

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Ngongo, Ward and Wayne

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rahkia Ismail, Alex Diner and Satnam Gill, and Mary Clement.

None.

None.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

The Chair varied the order of the agenda items to enable consideration of item B2 before item B1.

As Councillor Caluori was not present at the meeting it was noted that Item B3, Executive Member Questions, would be deferred. It was advised that Councillor Caluori would accept questions by email.

None.

220 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

Ernestas Jegorovas commented that there was not a specialist physics teacher in the borough and asked if the Committee would be looking into subject specific teaching shortages. In response, it was advised that there were national shortages in specialist teachers for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects and this required a national response. It was commented that Islington's location and excellent schools meant that the borough was able to attract high-quality teachers, which was not the case in some other London boroughs which did not have the same calibre of schools whilst housing and living costs were equally high.

221 THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF BME AND WHITE BRITISH PUPILS (ITEM NO. B2)

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary), Mark Taylor, Director of Schools and Learning, and Emma Simpson, Secondary English Consultant, introduced the report which provided an update on the achievement of BME pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- It was explained that Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals had a lower level of attainment than their peers. This trend was particularly pronounced in boys. The Committee considered how such issues could be addressed sensitively.
- The Committee discussed the need to raise awareness of the issue to parents and schools. It was noted that schools and parents considered young people as individuals, which meant that they may not be aware of wider demographic trends.
- The Committee was advised of the forthcoming Islington Equalities Conference for those working in the local education sector. The conference would explore how to narrow gaps in attainment, and would include opportunities for representatives from other boroughs to share their experiences.
- The attainment gap was a borough-wide issue and was not related to particular schools. It was advised that Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals performed relatively better in better performing schools, however the attainment gap persisted.
- The Committee queried the destinations data for Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals. Whilst detailed information was not available at the meeting, it was advised that BME pupils tended to progress well, and although the NEET cohort was very small, it was disproportionately comprised of White British pupils. It was noted that there was also a disproportionate number of White British boys in alternative provision and the PRU.
- The Committee suggested that the council and schools should collaborate further with supplementary schools and VCS organisations which were attended by Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals. Officers advised that this topic would be raised at a future meeting of the Schools Forum.
- The Committee queried the relatively high number of Black Caribbean pupils with special educational needs. In response, officers advised that there could either be a level of undiagnosed special educational needs among pupils from other ethnicities; or special educational needs could be over represented

among Black Caribbean pupils. Officers advised that they were concerned about this and were scrutinising the figures.

- It was suggested that different communities often had different values and perceptions of their relationship to the education system. It was emphasised that parents had to be approached carefully; previous attempts to raise such issues had not been well received.
- The Committee appreciated the wider social issues which affected attainment and queried how the council could practically seek to address such issues. Officers commented that further joint working across the council to reduce inequalities would be beneficial, although it was commented that the effects of this would only be realised in the longer term. Officers also highlighted the importance of early years services and the need to develop services which people wanted to engage with.
- The Committee commented on the importance of literacy. Although some young people didn't enjoy reading, it was acknowledged that reading underpinned all aspects of learning and sustained effort was needed to improve the literacy of struggling pupils.
- It was suggested that engaging community leaders may be an effective way to bring about change.
- Officers advised of the 'Islington Reads' initiative and highlighted that work was underway to change the perception of reading in primary schools. It was also commented that recent changes to GCSE syllabuses meant that pupils had to be able to evaluate very challenging texts and developed literacy skills were therefore essential.
- It was hoped that the Islington Equalities Conference would assist school leaders and council officers in identifying and agreeing practical actions which would bring about change.
- Emma Simpson advised of her ongoing research in evaluating the learning experiences of young people, taking into account school ethos, teaching styles, and how young people become alienated from education. This would identify best practice in teaching and motivating pupils from lower performing groups.
- It was recognised that breakfast clubs were a good method of providing wrap-around support to young people.
- In response to a member of the public, it was advised that although some schools performed better than others, all schools experienced the attainment gap. It was emphasised that the issue was cultural, rather than related to the actions of particular schools.

The Committee thanked the officers for their attendance.

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POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (ITEM NO. B1)

The Committee considered the evidence received and discussed possible conclusions of the scrutiny review.

The Committee considered that there appeared to be an adequate supply of post-16 opportunities for young people; however some young people either did not have the skills to progress or were not aware of the opportunities available. It was emphasised that it was important not to assign blame onto young people for this.

Members commented on the range of services and organisations available to support young people and queried if greater coordination, joint working and integration would lead to a more efficient and effective approach.

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It was commented that the evidence received from young people was particularly useful. It was important to view services from the perspective of young people and consider how services engage with those in need of support. It was suggested that establishing a one-stop shop to act as a single access point to employability support services would be helpful.

The Committee considered the importance of sustained interaction and engagement with the most difficult to reach young people. Only telling young people about the opportunities and services available once was not sufficient.

A discussion was had on the role of schools and youth organisations in publicising opportunities to young people, and it was thought that further work was needed to raise awareness of how to access vocational opportunities and apprenticeships. It was suggested that engagement with schools on such issues should take place at multiple levels; it was not sufficient to only approach Headteachers or careers leads.

It was commented that an induction session for teachers and others working with young people may be useful. This could focus on the range of services and opportunities available, how to make referrals, and other local issues affecting young people. It was important for young people to receive relevant and accurate advice from trusted adults.

It was identified that projects focused on supporting young people's employability skills tended to be time limited. The Committee considered that longer term and sustainable solutions were required. It was commented that the council may wish to reconsider its methodology for selecting partner organisations and how funding is allocated to the voluntary sector.

The Committee discussed the merits of the wrap-around careers advice provided in the London Borough of Hackney. It was queried how targeted and universal youth services could support the progression of young people in Islington.

It was requested that draft recommendations and a draft report be circulated to committee members for comment in advance of the next committee meeting.

A member of the public asked if governors needed a greater focus on outcomes and destinations given that they were responsible for holding schools to account. In response, it was advised that further support from governors would be welcomed. A termly governors briefing was held and this enabled such issues to be raised directly.

The Committee thanked officers for supporting the review.

223 EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B3)

Deferred.

224 REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.20 pm

Chair