

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 June 2023
(7:03 - 9:21 pm)

Present: Cllr Glenda Paddle (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Fatuma Nalule, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Muazzam Sandhu and Cllr Phil Waker; Sajjad Ali and Richard Hopkins

Also Present: Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Achilleos, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Paul Robinson, Cllr Mukhtar Yusuf, Glenda Spencer and Sarfraz Akram

1. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023 were confirmed as correct.

3. Update: How are we incorporating Race & Social Justice work into our schools' education programmes?

The Education Strategy Commissioning and Intelligence Lead and the Chief Executive of Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership (BDSIP) presented an update on how the Council, BDSIP and schools in the Borough were incorporating Race and Social Justice work into their education programmes. The Culture and Wellbeing Lead also detailed the Borough's Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) initiative known as 'Inspiring Futures', which worked to nurture links between cultural organisations and the Borough's schools, embedding cultural leadership and strengthening pathways for training and employment for the Borough's young people, into the cultural creative industries. Overall, the presentation outlined:

- The context behind the Race and Social Justice programme, and its three key themes of student experience and inclusion; staff experience, including recruitment and progression; and curriculum;
- The key features of the programme, such as the Race and Social Justice Charter, which set out the tangible commitments made by schools, and the programme leadership;
- Programme highlights; such as a Facilitators' Network which shared best practice amongst schools, provided external training and identified challenges and priorities;
- The Inspiring Futures Conference, which had taken place in November 2022;
- Case studies from schools, who had shared their practice through the Facilitators' Network;
- The context behind the Cultural Education Partnership, its priorities and

- how these would be achieved; and
- Some of the work and initiatives achieved through the Cultural Education Partnership, such as the INIVA workshops, the Young Creators Makerspace, and close partnership working with Film Barking and Dagenham, to encourage young people to consider careers in film, and to diversify the industry at point of entry.

In response to questions from the Committee's co-opted Members, officers stated that:

- 45 out of the Borough's 60 schools were actively engaged in the Race and Social Justice programme. All schools had been approached to join, with the programme also having been promoted through events such as the Annual Headteachers' Conference, the Annual CEP Conference and the Governors' Conference; however, schools needed to want to participate of their own volition and could not be forced to take part. The 45 participating schools had also created a very close and collaborative network; it was suggested that forcing other schools to join this when they did not wish to, could potentially jeopardize some of this already close partnership working.
- Officers were grateful for current funding received, which could help to enhance the programme such as through enabling guest speakers to attend workshops; however, the most important aspect was that schools gave their time and energy to the programme, and were passionate about the project.
- The Facilitator Networks enabled schools to share case studies of their work; sometimes, this would revolve around the curriculum and other times this would detail broader issues, such as around staff survey feedback in relation to race and social justice issues, and actions to address this. Training was also provided around the curriculum, such as around diversifying learning opportunities.
- Officers had deliberately avoided setting monitoring and success criteria, as they were keen to ensure that as many schools as possible joined the programme and could begin from their own starting points. This approach had also been agreed with headteachers and those helping to lead the programme. It was key that the programme was viewed as an ongoing journey, rather than as a tickbox exercise. Officers regularly reported back to the Council as to key highlights and case studies from the programme; case studies were also a great way of encouraging other schools to consider their own approach and what else they could implement as part of their work.
- The one key metric to be highlighted was around engagement in schools, with work being done to increase further uptake.

The Young Mayor and the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum representatives expressed their concern that only 15 schools (only 2 of which were secondaries) had signed up to the Leeds Beckett anti-racism award, noting their own experiences with racism within schools and the importance of addressing this in children's school years, which were such a pivotal time in young peoples' lives. In response to questions, officers stated that:

- Every school had been invited to sign up to the Leeds Beckett anti-racism award. Paramijt Roopra, the Headteacher of Northbury Primary School and a lead for the Race and Social Justice Programme, had been instrumental

in promoting the programme to other schools; the fact that this message had come from another headteacher had been particularly impactful. Lead facilitators had been fundamental in promoting the programme, which also featured in a regular newsletter that was sent out to the Borough's schools.

- It was understood that this programme would not necessarily be the right tool for all schools, and so officers had deliberately avoided being prescriptive.
- Some schools had not joined the Leeds Beckett Award, such as All Saints Catholic School, as they had already put in place an award with another body, for example, to undertake an anti-racism equality charter.
- Officers were open to any suggestions from young people, their peers and colleagues in their schools as to how to expand the programme in schools.
- The Borough's special education schools, such as Trinity and Riverside Bridge, had been very engaged in the programme, with Trinity having also contributed best practice case studies as to their work at the programme's launch conference. This work had been particularly inspirational to other schools, as to how they could adapt their own work.
- In terms of encouraging young people to explore creative industry opportunities outside of the workshops, consistency of messaging and ensuring that the correct messaging was going out to schools, was vital. There were also continued professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff, such as to enable them to better understand these industries and then pass these messages down to pupils. The creative industry was one of the fastest growing in the country and was unlikely to be as hit by artificial intelligence (AI) as other industries in the future, meaning a greater robustness. Messaging also needed to support young people to find out information, as well as to empower their parents to feel confident about the opportunities in the industry.

In response to further questions from Members, officers stated that:

- There were lots of future opportunities for young people in the Borough, with the London food markets moving to Dagenham Dock and pathways being developed into the food and hospitality industries. It was therefore important to ensure that these opportunities were accessible to all schools and young people in the Borough.
- Lots of work was undertaken with cultural organisations on a strategic level, to ensure that Barking and Dagenham was seen as an attractive place to work, deliver programmes and be a partner organisation. As such, many of the initiatives offered to schools were free.
- Whilst not every young person would be interested in the film industry, it was important to recognise that there would be a need for related careers as part of this, such as for film and media law and film and media accountancy, as well as for skilled trades such as electricians, carpenters and metal workers. It was essential to help young people to best know their own pathways and progression routes and to support parents in this.
- Funding could prove a challenge, as the creative industry was often seen as a nicety rather than an essential. It was also important to talk to senior leaders in schools and explain how creative work linked to the wider strategic agenda, such as around its impact on the lives and the mobility of young people in their care.
- Where schools had not joined the programme, they were included in race

and social justice work through events such as Headteachers' Conferences, where race and social justice speakers were part of the agenda, to enable them to learn and to further encourage their interest.

- Schools had done great work around diversifying their curriculums, such as through incorporating more diverse books into these, and through hosting race and social justice talks for their children and young people. Members praised this work undertaken so far and highlighted the importance of amending the curriculum to include more information around race and social justice where possible.

Members, the Young Mayor and the BAD Youth Forum representatives emphasised the importance of children and young people learning about each other's cultures and experiences; whilst it was understood that there was a desire for each school to join the programme at its own pace, the diversity of the local community meant that there was a great need for schools to join, and that an opt-in voluntary approach, rather than a mandatory approach, meant that many young people were missing out on crucial learning and inclusion opportunities. The Young Mayor and the BAD Youth Forum encouraged officers to approach young people to hear their opinions and enable them to hold their schools to account; whilst officers had worked with groups such as the Peer Support Group (PSG) and Flipside in the context of 'Inspiring Futures', they had not yet engaged with the BAD Youth Forum around the Race & Social Justice programme and agreed to attend a session to seek the perspectives of its young people.

Officers, along with the Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement, urged Members to disseminate information about the programmes to schools (especially to those where they were parent governors), to encourage programme uptake and to further promote the importance of race and social justice work, as well as cultural education opportunities for young people. Officers also noted that the programme was not intended to be a "quick fix"; whilst lots of positive work and engagement had been undertaken over the past two years, more work was still to be done and officers requested that they return in a year to report back on progress, by which point it was hoped that further schools would have signed up to the programme.

4. Update: Quality of Schools' Recovery Post Covid-19

The Interim Head of School Performance and Partnerships (HSPP) delivered an update presentation on the quality of schools' recovery post-Covid-19. This detailed:

- The current cohorts of children and young people, and the great impact of the pandemic on their learning;
- Statistics from the Prince's Trust around young people's thoughts as to their futures, with an overwhelmingly negative outlook due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis in particular, as to their future work prospects, job security and life aspirations;
- The fact that whilst exam grades were now being graded as those prior to the pandemic and were "going back to normal", that normal still felt a very long way to go in schools;
- The general consensus that whilst all children and young people had been impacted by the pandemic, those youngest had been particularly affected;

- 2022 outcomes for primary, GCSE and post-16, with both positive and negative results;
- Information as to pupil attendance, Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), suspensions and exclusions;
- Stresses on the system, such as increased numbers of children and young people suffering from mental health and anxiety problems, and a doubling of requests for Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, which were now standing at 500 per annum;
- Staffing issues as a result of the pandemic, such as higher absence rates and lower resilience, and severe recruitment issues for more specialised support;
- Positive OFSTED inspections of the Borough's primary and secondary schools, which spoke very positively as to their resilience and increased support for children and young people's wellbeing. 95% of the Borough's schools were rated as "good" or "outstanding", which was above the London average;
- The positive OFSTED thematic review of alternative provision in the Borough, which had taken place in March 2023; and
- Further positive approaches to supporting pupil wellbeing and learning, such as the introduction of the 'Best Chance Strategy'.

The Church Representative (Church of England) Co-optee praised the Borough's excellent alternative provision and its schools' OFSTED outcomes, having worked as a Headteacher in the Borough previously and noting the hard work and passion needed to achieve these.

In response to questions from the Committee's co-opted Members, the HSPP stated that:

- Whilst schools' data did not always look positive, despite their achievements, the OFSTED framework itself no longer put a huge value on data. When OFSTED went into schools in the Borough, it saw that the schools were performing very well in the context in which they were operating. This included looking at wellbeing, what happened both inside and outside of the classroom, extracurricular activity and what happened to support young people when they were not doing so well. Whilst schools needed to continue to be ambitious for their young people, ensuring that their results were as close to or beyond the London and national averages, OFSTED recognised that education was holistic, and that schools brought multiple strengths.
- A report published by the Government on 7 June 2023 noted that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged young people had reverted to where it had been 10 years prior to the pandemic. Whilst exam results were important, pupils needed to be supported holistically.

The Young Mayor noted her own experiences of the pandemic and its effect on her education, highlighting the disparity that would very likely be seen in the upcoming exam results. She noted that the education system felt very rigid and unsupportive in some aspects, rather than being holistic, and discussed some of her own experiences in relation to pupil attendance, noting the various reasons as to absence for students, such as through feeling unsupported in their school environments when facing issues. She also highlighted the difficult working

conditions for teachers, which contributed to issues with staff retention and expressed her concerns around the impact of this for future pupils who would sit exams. The HSPP expressed her concern as to the negative experiences of the Young Mayor. She noted that the OFSTED framework was a national comparator, which reflected the different experiences in schools across the UK. She also echoed the difficulties in the teaching profession, highlighting the impact of Covid-19 and the support that schools worked to provide, despite recruitment issues in terms of specialist support.

In response to questions from Members, the Commissioning Director for Education stated that:

- The Council has around £50m in its high needs budget that it spends broadly on children with additional and special educational needs. The allocations are agreed at Schools' Forum, which includes Headteacher representatives. We have to make the best use of the resource in a context where there are not enough specialist placements across the country. We aim to educate locally as far as is possible. In 2022 the number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments being requested doubled. School budgets are under pressure owing to rising costs and recruitment of specialist support staff is challenging. There are many children who need an Additional Resource Provision (ARP) placement or a special school placement. The local authority continues to increase places but at the moment more are still needed owing to increased demand.
- Barking and Dagenham is one of the few local authorities in the country that do not have a deficit on its high needs block and do not have to make savings or cuts to high needs provision. Whilst there are lots of stresses in the system, there are positives and strengths. There is funding (although never enough), schools are highly inclusive, there are 34 ARPs (one of the highest proportions in the country), meaning that many children can be in a mainstream school alongside getting specialist support). There is a very strong Culture of LBBDD schools working together.
- Barking and Dagenham has created 160 additional special school places in the last couple of years, with another 36 becoming available from September 2023. To give an indication of the pressure 19 children have come into the borough from other parts of the country since January 2023, requiring a special school place, highlighting the difficult context that schools and the local authority were working in.
- Barking and Dagenham has put together a commission of around £400k to pay for private speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, to address the gaps in health provision for our children.

Members praised the response of schools to the Covid-19 pandemic and their work in supporting the Borough's pupils. The Chair requested that officers return to update the Committee as to schools' recovery progress, in one year's time.

5. Readiness for the SEND Area Inspection

This item was deferred to the Committee's 12 July 2023 meeting, to enable it to receive the necessary time and attention from the Committee.

6. Draft Work Programme 2023/24

The Draft Work Programme for 2023/24 was agreed.