Scrutiny Review: Haringey Family of Schools

A Review by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel

2021/22

Panel Membership	
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	Cllr James Chiriyankandath
	Cllr Josh Dixon
	Cllr Emine Ibrahim
	Cllr Sarah James
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	Anita Jakhu (Co-opted member)
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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

There are now a far greater variety of schools than previously, with a number of new types being established in recent years. The resulting fragmentation presents challenges for local authorities, which include ensuring that all schools are providing a good standard of education and planning and co-ordinating the provision of school places. Schools are also now subject to varying degrees of local democratic control and the capacity of local authorities to influence them has been diminished.

In addition, demand for primary school places has reduced and there is currently a significant surplus of reception places in Haringey. This has serious budgetary implications for many primary schools due to the way in which schools are funded. The drop in demand for places will feed through to secondary schools in due course. Demand for school places is subject to fluctuation though and there will also be a need for sufficient places to be available to accommodate future any increases in demand for places.

Our review report looks at how the Council could respond most effectively and strategically to these issues and makes a number of recommendations. I would like to thank all of the those who contributed to the review by giving evidence and informed the work of the Panel.

Cllr Makbule Gunes
Chair

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Schools Landscape

Our Key Findings:

▸ There are clear, significant and permanent changes that occur when schools become academies. These are not always fully explained to school governors who may therefore be unaware of the long-term implications of their decisions.

▸ Schools that are part of MATs may not feel that they are part of a local community of schools or have any responsibility towards their local authority or area. In Haringey, there is a lack of involvement by MATs with the Council, HEP and other schools and challenges in engaging with them. The Panel was unsuccessful in its two attempts to engage with representatives from MATs within the borough to receive their perspective so that it could be considered in the review.

▸ The key means by which local authorities can help schools avoid feeling the need to convert to academies or being required to do so is by supporting them effectively to improve performance. Schools that value the support of the local authority are less likely to want to convert.

Arrangements in Haringey

Our Key Findings:

▸ Partnership bodies, such as HEP, provide "soft power" and are an excellent way of encouraging schools to remain part of the family of local schools. They can also help prevent forced academisations. HEP has been a powerful initiative that has allowed schools to buy into local school support services. It has also been successful in promoting collaboration between schools and dialogue, although this does not necessarily guarantee influence.

▸ There is a nevertheless a lack of involvement and/or influence between HEP and schools in MATS and it struggles to engage with them. St Thomas More, Greig City Academy and Dukes Academy are among the schools that are not involved.

▸ The Panel is aware of matters of concern relating to exclusions from schools run by MATs. A "deep dive" is currently being undertaken by the Council on school exclusions and this will involve at least one academy trust. It is important that this review is wide ranging and involves consultation with referral units, alternative provision, schools and young people who have been through the exclusions process. It also needs to be established whether there are disproportionate rates of exclusion in some schools or types of school. Clarity also needs to be provided for school governing bodies on the role of the local authority in the exclusions process.

Our Recommendation:

1. That the "deep dive" on school exclusions currently being undertaken by the Council is:

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- Wide ranging and involves consultation with referral units, alternative provision, schools and young people who have been through the exclusions process;
- Contains clear recommendations and an action plan;
- Establishes whether there are disproportionate rates of exclusion in some schools or types of school; and
- Considers and clarifies the role(s) undertaken by the local authority in the exclusions process *(paragraph 3.18)*.

Evidence from Other Boroughs

Our Key Findings:

▸ The Panel noted the differences in the arrangements of Tower Hamlets and Hackney, many of which were due their individual circumstances and history. There are also many similarities though, particularly in the strong focus on school improvement and collaboration.

▸ The Panel felt that there were no clear benefits to Haringey that could be foreseen for Haringey promoting federations. Informal ways of collaboration between schools could provide most of the same benefits.

School Admissions

Our Key Findings:

▸ It can be hard to change the perception of schools that parents have, which is often outdated. Positive engagement needs to take place to raise the profile of less popular schools.

▸ The Council may have limited scope to co-ordinate a strategic response to the reduction in demand for school places as it can only directly influence a minority of schools. There was already only limited scope in respect of voluntary aided schools but the emergence of new types of school has exacerbated the situation. The only way that the Council will be able to exert influence is through negotiation and voluntary engagement and there are limits to this due to the lack of a close relationship with MATs.

▸ The Panel noted that at least one school that is part of a MAT has attempted to expand even when there are surplus school places. It may therefore be the case that not all schools will be receptive to engagement by the Council. Schools may well find themselves competing for pupils, with less popular schools becoming unsustainable. This will make it difficult to maintain a balanced range of school provision across the borough.

Our Recommendations:

2. That work be undertaken to better understand how outdated or inaccurate perceptions regarding the quality of education in individual schools can better be addressed *(5.7)*.

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3.   That positive engagement is arranged by the Council to raise the profile of less popular schools in the borough *(5.7)*.

Church Schools

Our Key Findings:

▸ The changes to schools that academisation entails are profound and further lessen the scope for a coordinated response to the reduction in school rolls. These particularly threaten the viability of church schools as they are amongst those schools suffering from the largest drops in demand for places.

▸ It is important that school governing bodies of church schools understand fully what becoming an academy will entail and its long-term implications. The Council should work with Diocesan authorities to ensure that all school governing bodies are given clear and impartial guidance or are signposted to sources of independent advice.

▸ Evidence was received that the relationship between Diocesan authorities and the Council is now less close it was and that regular meetings between the Diocese and senior Council officers are no longer taking place. It was nevertheless encouraged to hear that the Diocesan authorities were interested in hearing the ideas of the local authority on the downturn in demand for places. The Panel is therefore of the view that it is essential that further efforts are made to engage with the Diocesan authorities and re-establish close relationships.

Our Recommendations:

4.   That the Council work with the diocesan authorities to ensure that school governing bodies are given clear and impartial guidance on the implications of academisation or are signposted to sources of independent advice *(6.13)*.

5.   That action take place to re-establish close relationships between the Council and the diocesan authorities and collaborate closely with them in addressing the downturn in demand for school places *(6.14)*.

Schools Finance

Our Key Findings:

▸ Finance is a major influence on curriculum development. Schools might know what they need to do to improve but unable to do it as they do not have sufficient money. School improvement plans should therefore be designed so that they are affordable to schools.

▸ There is currently no analysis of the cost effectiveness of schools and work should be undertaken to develop a suitable offer of this for schools. Schools can increase their income through a range of fund-raising activities but their ability to do this and effectiveness at it are unequal. Schools therefore have varying amounts of per capita funding available. Any assessment of the cost effectiveness of schools therefore needs to take into account the totality of the funding available to them.

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- There would be merit in developing consortia of schools to buy in services as this could enable economies of scale to be achieved. This should be looked at through the Schools Forum and consideration given to how schools can be supported in developing them.

Our Recommendations:

6.   That an offer be developed for schools of an analysis of their cost effectiveness and that this is based on the totality of their income, including that from fund-raising activities and other additional sources *(7.16).*

7.   That a report on the development of consortia of schools to buy in services be submitted to the Schools Forum and consideration given to how schools could be supported in developing them. *(7.18).*

1. Background

1.1 The review was set up to:
- Seek to identify the different categories of school that there are within Haringey and their characteristics, as well as the diversity of curriculum and ethos offered by individual schools;
- Consider the ways that might be available to the Council to influence schools within the borough and, in particular, facilitate school improvement and co-ordination of school places most effectively; and
- Look at practice in other local authority areas and what appears to have been most effective.

1.2 The review would then go on to consider how the Council might best respond strategically to the significant surplus in school reception places in Haringey. These have serious budgetary implications for schools due to the way in which they are funded. Demand for school places fluctuates and there will also be a need for sufficient places to be available to accommodate any future increases in demand. The ability of the Council to respond depends on the influence that it has over schools and this has been affected by the change in status of a number of them.

1.3 As part of this, the review considered:
- The role the Council has in working with schools to effectively manage the reductions in school rolls;
- How a balanced range of school provision across the borough might best be maintained; and
- What could be done to mitigate financial pressures on schools and ensure that any adverse effects on schools are minimised.

1.4 The terms of reference of the review were as follows:
"To consider and make recommendations to Cabinet on how the Council might influence schools within the borough most effectively and, in particular, facilitate school improvement and co-ordination of school places."

1.5 The Panel received evidence from the following:
- Eveleen Riordan, Assistant Director of Schools and Learning;
- James Page, Chief Executive of Haringey Education Partnership;
- Brian Smith, Interim Schools Finance Manager;
- Josephine Lyseight, Head of Finance (People);
- Carlo Kodsi, Head of School Admissions, Education and School Organisation;
- Nick Shasha, School Place Planning Lead;
- Inigo Woolf, Chief Executive, London Diocesan Board for Schools;
- Nigel Spears, Assistant Director of Education, Catholic Diocese of Westminster;
- Professor Anne West, London School of Economics;
- David Wolfe, Matrix Chambers;
- Tracy Smith, Executive Director, Tower Hamlet Education Partnership;
- Abrilli Phillip, Director of Education and Learning; and
- Marian Lavelle, Head of Admissions and Benefits, Hackney Council.

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1.6   The review began just before the Covid-19 pandemic and its progress was delayed by lockdown. In addition, most of the evidence gathering had to be undertaken virtually, using MS Teams. Specific efforts were made to engage with Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) on two occasions but unfortunately it was not possible to obtain evidence directly from them.

1.7   The membership of the Panel was as follows:

<u>2020/21:</u>
Councillors: Erdal Dogan (Chair), Dana Carlin, James Chiriyankandath, Josh Dixon, Tammy Palmer, Anne Stennett and Elin Weston

Co-opted Members: Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever (Church representatives) Anita Jakhu and KanuPriya Jhunjhunwala (Parent Governor representatives)

<u>2021/22:</u>
Councillors: Makbule Gunes (Chair), James Chiriyankandath, Emine Ibrahim, Sarah James, Tammy Palmer and Daniel Stone

Co-opted Members: Lourdes Keever (Church representative) and KanuPriya Jhunjhunwala (Parent Governor representative)

2.   The Schools Landscape

Types of School

2.1   Most local authority areas now contain a range of different types of state school. They can be put into two overall categories:
- Maintained schools, which are funded by the local authority;
- Schools that are not maintained by the local authority but funded directly by the Secretary of State for Education, such as academies and free schools.

2.2   There are now four types of local authority maintained school;
- Community Schools;
- Voluntary Aided Schools – often with a 'faith designation';
- Voluntary Controlled Schools – also often with a 'faith designation'; and
- Foundation Schools.

Legal Status

2.3   The Panel received evidence from David Wolfe from Matrix Chambers and Professor Anne West from the London School of Economics about the characteristics of the different types of school that now exist and the implications of these.

2.4   Maintained schools are overseen by local authorities and constituted as free-standing legal entities. They have "stakeholder" governing bodies, which make all the key decisions, such as the budget, appointment of head teacher and ethos of the school. Such schools operate according to standard statutory education law, including the National Curriculum. In Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, the local authority sets the admissions policy. For Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools, it is the church or the foundation that sets it.

2.5   Academies are independent and not classified as maintained schools. Most statutory education law, including the National Curriculum, does not apply to them, although provisions regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN) do. Academies operate under a contract with the Secretary of State (SoS) and are administered through Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs). They are funded and controlled by the SoS through a Funding Agreement, which imposes some of the same rules as those for maintained schools, such as the Admissions Code. The local authority has no direct role but schools can still buy services in from them and from local education partnerships.

2.6   Some academies are newly created schools, either from before 2010 or later as 'free schools'. Other schools converted to academy status voluntarily or were forced to convert following poor Ofsted inspections. Some schools volunteered in anticipation of obliged to convert due to performance issues.

2.7   Whilst some academies still have stand-alone governing bodies that make all the decisions, not many of these remain. Most academies are now local sites for Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) ('federations', 'chains') and have no separate legal identity. The governing body, if there is one, is appointed by the MAT and can

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only decide on what it delegates to them. The parent body is the legal entity and individual schools have no separate identity of their own.

2.8 Mr. Wolfe used Thomas More School, which is now part of the Cardinal Hume Academies Trust, as an example. Although there is a local governing body, it can only make decisions that are delegated to it by the Academies Trust. The powers of governing bodies from individual schools within MATs are not comparable to governing bodies of maintained schools.   Whilst schools might not appear to be different when they become part of an academy trust, the reality is that they change significantly.

2.9 It is the responsibility of the SoS to resolve any performance issues with individual schools. In such circumstances, the SoS can seek to broker a deal with another organisation but there is no specific role for the local authority or local people. Although academies were created with aim of setting them free from local authority control, local people and school governors have less jurisdiction in such schools and especially those within MATs.

Funding

2.10 Academies have access to additional sources of funding but it is not possible to determine how much MATs provide for individual schools. It is also not possible to find out how MATs spend their money. Some information has emerged but this has often been from "whistle blowers". MATs cannot make a profit from their main budget but can make money from companies associated with their trustees. Regulation has been tightened up but there is still a lack of information on how money is used.

2.11 Mr. Wolfe reported that an edition of "Panorama" had focused on alleged misuse of funding by the Bright Tribe Trust, who had awarded contracts to companies associated with trustees.   There had been an issue with the way in which money had been spent and some schools had not received funding intended for them. Individual schools are often unaware of funding arrangements.

2.12 There have been periods when exclusions from academies were higher than those for maintained schools. Maintained schools can be forced to accommodate pupils that have been excluded from other schools but this does not apply to academies.

Checks and Balances

2.13 Academies have more autonomy and some do not feel that they are part of a local community of schools or have any responsibility towards the local authority or area. As they are no longer as accountable to the local authority, there are fewer checks and balances on them.

2.14 Central government does not have the resources to provide the necessary financial oversight. Whilst there are RSCs, they cover very large areas and have nothing like the same oversight as local authorities. RSCs are civil servants and do not have the same accountabilities as local authorities and school governors.

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They act on behalf of the Secretary of State and do not have a direct relationship with local authorities, although some engage with them.

2.15 Professor West stated that 77% of secondary schools had converted to academies and a lower percentage of primary schools. There is still a hard core of schools that are not intending to convert though. Whilst maintained schools that are failing can be forced to convert to an academy, failing academies cannot be converted back into maintained schools. Performance data shows that there is no significant difference between academies and maintained schools and conversions have failed to deliver better academic results.

Relationships

2.16 Mr. Wolfe commented that, although role of the local authority is diminished when schools became part of MATs, it is nevertheless important to maintain good relationships. Sometimes this can work well but it depends on the willingness of academies to engage. This does not mean that they should not be subject to challenge though. The main impact on children and families from schools becoming academies comes when things go wrong. In particular, exclusions, SEN and admissions can have an impact and cause problems for some families.

2.17 Local authorities can help schools avoid feeling the need to convert or being required to do so by supporting them effectively to improve performance. Schools that value the support of the local authority are less likely to want to convert.

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3.   Arrangements in Haringey

Role of Council

3.1   The Panel heard that the Council undertakes still a wide range of educational duties, including statutory ones:
- It ensures that are sufficient school places for children and is responsible for school place planning;
- It is responsible for children who are not on school rolls. This includes ensuring that any home schooled children are being educated appropriately;
- Education Welfare is a key responsibility. Education Welfare Officers speak regularly to schools and families where there are attendance concerns;
- There is a virtual school for looked after children that seeks to improve their performance as they are less likely to achieve high levels of attainment than other children;
- There is a Schools Finance Service to support schools. The Council is also responsible for the school's capital programme and acts as landlord, which allows schools to resolve any urgent maintenance issues quickly; and
- It works closely with schools on safeguarding matters and in respect of social care.

School Improvement

3.2   The Panel heard that Haringey Education Partnership (HEP) is now responsible for facilitating school improvement within the borough's schools. It does not have statutory powers in respect of intervention though as it is the local authority that still holds these.   HEP aspires to be the "glue in the system" that holds Haringey schools together, mitigating the impact of fragmentation. Whilst HEP has no specific view on the merits of schools becoming academies, it wishes to avoid them being forced into it due to performance issues.

3.3   The development of HEP stems from 2016 and the publication of the government's education White Paper, which outlined its plans for all schools to either become academies or be in the process of converting to academy status by 2020. Funding for school improvement in the Education Services Grant was subsequently slashed, amounting to a £795k cut in Haringey.   Whilst there was no great appetite for academisation amongst Haringey schools, they welcomed some of the policy direction and especially having greater independence.

3.4   Local authorities responded to the government's new policy in three overall ways:
- Promoting Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and withdrawing from school improvement e.g. Bexley;
- Commissioning a partnership with a private provider e.g. Barnet; or
- Developing local alliances or education partnerships.

3.5   Haringey responded by creating HEP, which is a schools owned and led improvement partnership. Partnerships such as HEP have flourished and seek to combine the best elements of local authorities and MATs. They are used by a range of local authorities, including Camden, Sheffield, Liverpool and Birmingham.

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3.6   Partnerships have helped maintain some collective responsibility for education quality and pupil outcomes. They have also kept schools connected, drawing on their collective strengths and tackling shared issues. They are accountable to the schools that own them, with financial consequences for their performance.

3.7   HEP was established in September 2018. Although it works in close partnership with the Council, it is independent. Its prime purpose is to improve outcomes through driving school improvement. HEP supports a range of schools in Haringey and is now also providing services to 15 Enfield schools. 96% of its schools are now rated as good or outstanding by OFSTED.

3.8   HEP is a single tier membership organisation. The Panel heard that it has no interest in expanding into other services or growth for its own sake. HEP aspires to build strong relationships with schools and is regularly in contact with them through Improvement Partners, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), meetings, briefings, events, networks and conferences. Regular feedback is sought from schools to ensure that it is working well for them and providing good value for money. 9 out of 10 schools have said that they would recommend its services.

3.9   The core membership package includes:
- Challenge and support, with access to dedicated improvement partners, Headteacher hotline, governor support and advice;
- Data analysis, with an annual school profile and additional analysis tailored to individual schools;
- Curriculum and pedagogy support;
- An extensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme;
- Strategic projects, such as Black Caribbean and BAME achievement, parental engagement and remote learning;
- SEND support, including a SENCO network, policy updates, training, peer review and support, pupil and parent voice;
- Assistance with safeguarding, including Designated Safeguarding Lead networks, annual audit, policy updates, training and qualifications;
- Collaboration, including school improvement networks and peer review, heads and senior leader forums, post-16 network;
- Assistance with compliance, including SACRE, moderation and monitoring, website compliance checks;
- Briefings including weekly Headteacher and governor briefings; and
- Keeping schools connected to the latest research, policy and innovations.

3.10   All HEP's Improvement Partners are currently or recently been successful Headteachers. Some have also been lead OFSTED inspectors or Department for Education advisers.

3.11   CPD for schools is extensive and aims to be responsive to the priorities of schools. It includes curriculum, pedagogy, subject networks and strategic priorities as part of the membership package. Work is taking place with North East London Teaching School Hub to develop a full suite of national professional qualifications with the aim of making Haringey the most attractive place to teach and lead in schools. The aim of is to try and attract the best teachers to come and develop their careers in Haringey.

3.12   Improving Black Caribbean and BAME Achievement is one of HEP's top priorities. This was developed in response to a performance analysis of Haringey that revealed significant under performance by young people from these communities, with gaps in 2016 being the highest in the country. A strategy, pledge and a suite of resources has all been developed and free training and BAME reviews are offered to schools.

3.13   HEP promotes collaboration between schools, including through six Networked Learning Communities, which are geographical groupings of approximately 15 schools which are school improvement focussed. £10k per annum is invested in each network. Recent areas of work have included transition and BAME achievement.

3.14   HEP recognises that there is pressure on school budgets and aims to provide value for money. Membership and traded costs have therefore remained unchanged from HEP's inception. Core membership costs £19 per pupil, capped at £12.5k for the largest schools. Core membership subscriptions provide approximately one third of HEP's income, with the remainder coming from additional traded services and funding for school improvement passported by the Council. The funding that HEP receives from the Council is from that specifically earmarked for schools from the DfE and none comes from the General Fund. It is hoped that falling school rolls will not impact on HEP's income but some schools may no longer be able to pay as much. Efforts are being made to ensure that HEP is sustainable and this includes its expansion into Enfield.

3.15   The Panel are of the view that HEP has been a powerful initiative and has enabled schools to buy into local school support services. It has also been successful in promoting collaboration between schools and dialogue, although this does not guarantee influence. Partnership bodies such as HEP provide soft power and are an excellent way of getting schools to rely on the local authorities and remain part of the family of local schools. An effective school improvement function can also play an important role preventing forced academisations of schools due to performance issues.

3.16   A majority of schools in Haringey are members of HEP. The Panel noted that schools that are part of MATs tend not to belong though. There is little influence or involvement with MATs and HEP struggles to engage with them. St Thomas More, Greig City Academy and Dukes Academy are among schools that are not involved. The Panel was unsuccessful in its two attempts to engage with representatives from MATs within the borough to receive their perspective so that it could be considered in the review.

3.17   The Panel was not reassured by the evidence it received regarding the relationship between the Council and HEP with MATs in the borough. It is also aware of matters of concern relating to exclusions from schools run by MATs. It noted that a "deep dive" is currently being undertaken by the Council on school exclusions and that this will include at least one academy trust. All schools invited to participate have agreed to assist and an action plan will be drafted as a result of this process.

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3.18 The Panel feels that it is important that the review on exclusions is wide ranging and involves consultation with referral units, alternative provision, schools and young people who have been through the exclusions process. It also needs to be established whether there are disproportionate rates of exclusion in some schools or types of school. In addition, clarity needs to be provided for school governing bodies on the role of the local authority in the exclusions process.

Recommendation:

That the "deep dive" on school exclusions currently being undertaken by the Council is:

- Wide ranging and involves consultation with referral units, alternative provision, schools and young people who have been through the exclusions process;
- Establishes whether there are disproportionate rates of exclusion in some schools or types of school; and
- Clarifies the role(s) undertaken by the local authority in the exclusions process.

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4.   Evidence from Other Boroughs

4.1   The Panel received evidence regarding how other local authorities are aiming to ensure that all schools were providing a good standard of education and minimise the impact of fragmentation.

Tower Hamlets

4.2   Evidence was sought from Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) as they were used as a case study by the Local Government Association in research on action by local authorities to support local school improvement.   Of particular relevance was the explicit desire expressed by THEP to avoid fragmentation and retain the "family of schools" within Tower Hamlets.

4.3   The Panel noted that, like Haringey, there had been no great appetite in Tower Hamlets for schools to convert to academies following the publication of the government White Paper in 2016.   There had been a long tradition of collaborative working between schools and the Council. The borough had been bottom of the education performance tables but worked its way up. This had been achieved through effective partnership working. THEP was set up as a charity and separate from the Council. Although it was independent, the Council had a key role and a strong relationship with THEP.

4.4   THEP was set up by schools and works very closely with the local authority. Some educational partnerships were business focused but THEP's prime focus is education. 97 schools in the borough currently belong to it. Only 6 do not belong and these are part of MATs.   THEP works with three schools that are part of MATs despite them not formally being members. The school improvement role that is undertaken involves monitoring and risk assessment of schools. THEP also provides professional learning opportunities and a range of other services.

4.5   Whilst the schools structure had become more fragmented in the borough, it was probably less so than elsewhere and THEP had helped bring schools together. An important factor was the fact that many of those who had contributed significantly to the large improvement of schools in the borough are now involved in THEP. The local authority still undertakes its statutory roles, including pupil place planning.   There are falling school rolls within the borough and three schools will be closing in response to this.

4.6   There is a cycle of improvement.   A comprehensive risk assessment is undertaken on every school and this looks at a wide range of matters. Suitable interventions are identified and an action plan developed.   There is also a comprehensive learning offer for schools. The quality of support that is provided by THEP is regarded as high and all of those who work directly with schools to provide support have previously been Headteachers. Collaboration is promoted, including peer review as it is felt that schools can learn much from each other. They have tried to make their offer comprehensive and attractive to schools.

Hackney

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4.7 Ms Lavelle reported on the work that Hackney Council has undertaken to build good relationships with schools. Hackney does not have an arm's length education partnership organisation, such as HEP or THEP. It has its own school improvement team that trades with schools and academies and can monitor all of them.

4.8 The good relationships that Hackney has with schools are due to several factors. A very high percentage of Hackney pupils – around 40% - had previously gone out of borough for their education. Some schools in Hackney had been closed by the Council and this had been a difficult process. However, neighbouring Tower Hamlets had surplus places at the time and this had ensured that there were sufficient places for all Hackney children.

4.9 Hackney had re-built its capacity by developing the Hackney family of schools. They had done this through the setting up of academies. It had ensured continuing influence on the academies that were set up by requiring there to be a Member of the local authority on each academy board. All academies also needed to have similar admissions arrangements. Schools had previously all had their own arrangements for banding. Agreement was sought from all schools for testing for bands. All schools currently participated in in-year access arrangements and the fair access protocol. The Council traded with all schools, including academies.

4.10 It is predominantly secondary schools that are academies. It is not a factor in parental preferences when choosing schools. Some schools have been closed in the past due to poor performance but standards in schools and especially secondary schools have improved markedly in recent years.

4.11 The Panel noted that a conscious decision was taken by Hackney to establish academies as this was the only way that new schools could be opened at the time that they were created. Through this process, it had been possible to create three new schools in quick succession. some other schools had decided to convert to academies following this. Only one primary school had so far converted though. All other schools were either community schools or voluntary aided, including some that were part of federations. She felt that schools were not converting as they did not think that there was anything to be gained from doing so.

4.12 The Panel noted the differences in the arrangements of Tower Hamlets and Hackney, many of which are due their individual circumstances and history. There are also many similarities though, particularly in the strong focus on school improvement and collaboration.

Lambeth

4.13 The Panel looked closely at whether encouraging maintained schools to form federations might be of benefit. These seek to mirror the structure of MATs, with one overriding governing body covering several schools. This can have several benefits, including providing the opportunity for sharing services and achieving economies of scale. Evidence regarding how such arrangements had worked in Lambeth was received.

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4.14 The had been no formal policy or strategy in Lambeth to promote federations but, in particular circumstances and where there were clear benefits for schools, they had facilitated and/or brokered arrangements between school governing bodies. The number of federations in Lambeth has grown over a long period of time, with the first ones having been established in the mid to late 00s.

4.15 All had started with a "soft" federation, where schools retained their own governing bodies and often moving to consultation on "hard" federation over time. This tended to happen organically. In some cases, a federation had supported a school with the supported school later opting to join the federation following a period of "soft" partnership.

4.16 Whilst arrangements have often been brokered by the Council, it is very much for the individual schools and governing bodies to agree arrangements between themselves. There must be mutual understanding and trust between all parties, so it is a negotiated rather than a forced arrangement. Non-statutory partnership agreements are signed by governing body Chairs and Headteachers of partner schools for "soft" partnerships.

4.17 Lambeth has identified distinct benefits in respect of staff flexibility, retention and career progression as well as improved leadership capacity. Arrangements include a regular review of the non-statutory arrangements to ensure they are still benefiting all parties.

4.18 Officers from Lambeth commented that they had found that schools always learn from each other and that it is never all one way. In Lambeth, such partnerships have usually been established to enable a strong school or schools to support a weaker one or to boost leadership capacity. It was only now that they were discussing federations with schools in other contexts, such as falling rolls.

4.19 "Hard" federations of two or three schools seemed to work best in Lambeth. In larger federations, the legal requirements for the federation governing body constitution make it large and unwieldy, with scope for blurred accountability. It is not possible to replicate a MAT structure, with a small, focussed executive board, under the current federation regulations and this is unlikely to change.

4.20 The Panel noted that the use of federations in Lambeth was generally as a means of strong schools supporting weaker ones and felt that there were comparatively few schools in Haringey that needed such support. Pooling resources could nevertheless provide a degree of agility and possibly be of assistance in coming to terms with loss of income.

4.21 Mr. Page stated that HEP did not have a view on whether might be of benefit to schools in Haringey. His personal view though was that it would not make much difference. Any savings arising from the creation of federations were likely to be small. It could also create a complex and difficult set of relationships. In addition, schools already undertook a lot of work collaboratively.

4.22 Ms Riordan commented that there were already some examples of what could be termed as "soft" or informal federations in Haringey and a lot of school-to-school support already existed without the need for formal federation. There were

also Networked Learning Communities (NLC). In addition, some schools shared business managers.

4.23   Panel Members felt that there were no clear benefits to Haringey that could be foreseen for Haringey promoting federations. Informal ways of working could provide most of the same benefits.

5.   School Admissions

Place Planning

5.1   The Panel heard that the local authority has a statutory duty to provide school places for all school aged children resident in the borough. There is also a requirement to produce an annual school place planning report. The report is intended to be accurate for up to 4 years ahead. Planning is undertaken for 10 years though, based on the projected birth rate.

5.2   Demand for primary and secondary school places fluctuates and place planning analysis is undertaken constantly to match supply of places with current and projected demand. Just as it is necessary to ensure that there are sufficient places, there is a need to ensure that there are not too many places either. School funding is based on pupil numbers and schools face difficult financial challenges if they have too many places as their rolls will not be full.

5.3   Local authorities also have a duty of care to ensure children can receive a good education and access the full curriculum. Schools with a declining roll will find it difficult to provide this because of financial pressures from reduced funding. There needs to be around 25 pupils in each class just to cover teaching costs.

5.4   Academies have the option of changing admission criteria and, in the case of MATs, it is the Trust that decides. The intake to some academies is different from that of other schools. Some Trusts prioritise applications from children attending "feeder" schools. The only way that local authorities can exert influence is through negotiation and voluntary engagement. The Panel heard that Hackney Council have worked particularly well with academies to ensure that schools have a balanced intake.   Admission criteria can often be complex though and some academies just adopt the same ones as maintained schools.

Downward Trajectory

5.5   Demand for reception places has been on a downward trajectory since 2017 and projections suggest that it will not recover before 2025. The population in London has also gone down by the equivalent of an average sized borough since the start of the Covid pandemic. All boroughs are therefore looking at surplus capacity. Some boroughs are considering the closure of some schools but there are no current plans to do this in Haringey. Other ways to rationalise school rolls and numbers are instead being looked at, including reducing the number of forms of entry.

5.6   Additional capacity has been required for secondary schools in recent years and this has been provided through bulge classes, secured through collaboration with schools. The lower cohorts in primary schools will feed through to secondary schools in due course though. Some schools will fill up regardless of the smaller numbers of children seeking places because of their popularity. In these cases, furthest distance offered will just be bigger.

5.7   The Panel commented that it can be hard to change the perception of schools that parents have, which is often outdated. These may come from Ofsted reports

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or be anecdotal and can take time to change. Although the Panel notes that the Council needs to ensure that no single school is promoted over another one, it nevertheless feels that positive engagement needs to take place to raise the profile of less popular schools. It also feels that there is also a need to better understand how perceptions regarding schools could be influenced.

> ***Recommendations:***
> - That work be undertaken to better understand how outdated or inaccurate perceptions regarding the quality of education in individual schools can better be addressed; and
> - That positive engagement is arranged by the Council to raise the profile of less popular schools in the borough.

Planned Admission Numbers

5.8 Despite the statutory duty to provide school places for all school aged children, local authorities only have the authority to propose an amendment to the planned admission number (PAN) for community and voluntary controlled schools. This is an open and transparent process that allows people to object if they wish. Local authorities are unable to influence reductions in PAN for voluntary aided schools, free schools, foundation schools or academies. The process in respect of academies is opaque and generally involves a private conversation between the MAT and the RSC. Responsibility is therefore fragmented and this poses significant difficulties when school rolls are falling.

5.9 The School Admissions Code states that community and voluntary aided schools can object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they wish and it is therefore necessary to ensure that there is an evidence base behind any proposed reduction. Schools that reduce their PAN can increase it again. Where schools amalgamate, it needs to be borne in mind that demand for places can go up again and sites therefore need to be maintained for educational use.

5.10 57% (32) of all Haringey primary schools with a reception intake are community/voluntary controlled. 4 from 12 secondary schools (33%) are community schools.

Percentage of schools and pupils which Haringey can propose adjusting PAN

	Primary (56)	Secondary (12)
Percentage of schools community/VC	57% (32 schools)	33% (4 schools)
Percentage of pupils attending community/VC	63% (5,534 pupils)	34% (4,380 pupils)

5.11 This shows the limited role that Haringey has in being able to influence schools in proposing a reduction to their PAN. Several additional obstacles can also impact on the Council's ability to adjust PAN. These include:
- Maintaining a desirable balance between different varieties of school in each of the borough's 5 planning areas:
- The inability to lower PAN at one form entry schools: and
- The need to get buy-in from the headteacher, school governors, parents, teachers and local community to agree to any reduction.

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5.12 Despite these limitations, the Panel noted that Haringey made or assisted in the following temporary or permanent reductions in PAN across 4 of the 5 planning areas between 2016 and 2020.

PA	School	Planned Admission Number					Notes
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
2	St Mary's CofE	90	60	60	60	60	From Sept 17, PAN set to 2FE
2	St Peter in C.	60	60	60	30	30	Request Adjudicator to stay at 1FE for 2020
3	Stamford Hill	30	30	30	30	n/a	Proposed to close in Sept 2020
3	Tiverton	60	60	30	30	60	Amalg. with Stamford Hill in Sept 2020
4	Welbourne	90	90	90	90	60	Permanent reduction in PAN by 1FE from Sept 2020
4	Earlham	60	30	60	60	60	Temporary reduction in PAN in Sept. 2017
5	Trinity P.A.	60	60	60	90	60	Proposal to increase PAN unsuccessful

5.13 In addition to reducing PAN at some community schools, the Council has also assisted some faith schools in making temporary reductions to their PAN. There has been regular dialogue with both the Catholic and the Church of England Dioceses' about the necessity to act to preserve the sustainability of schools. In some circumstances, amalgamations may be necessary, especially if two form entry schools in close proximity to one another are struggling to fill their places.

Amalgamations

5.14 Discussions have taken place regarding the potential amalgamations of two Catholic schools with the headteacher, governors and the Diocese to enhance their sustainability and the local offer. Other Church schools have been identified as potential candidates for a temporary reduction in PAN from two to one FE. Data suggests that some of these schools have been consistently carrying a surplus of 20 or more vacancies.

5.15 Where schools are amalgamated, the Council wishes to maintain any vacant sites for educational purposes. They do not wish to be put in a position where there is a need to identify new sites due to an upturn in demand for school places. There are likely to be some redundancies and posts will be ring fenced if there was a need for such a process. Teachers can move between Haringey schools without the need for redundancy though. Decisions are the responsibility of headteachers and school governing bodies and the local authority has little power.

5.16 The Panel heard that the Council provided a robust evidence base to the DfE and Trinity Primary Academy against a proposed permanent expansion from 2 form entry (FE) to 3FE. This was because there were already a high number of surplus places locally and there was concern that the additional places could threaten the viability of other local schools. The DfE advised that Trinity will remain at 2FE for the foreseeable future.

5.17 The Panel noted that demand for places at faith schools is decreasing at twice the rate as for other schools. There has been engagement with diocesan authorities but have not always concurred with the Council's view. Where redundancies are necessary in faith schools, the local authority are responsible for meeting the cost.

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5.18   The Panel is of the view that Council has limited scope to co-ordinate any strategic response to the reduction in demand for school places as it can only directly influence a minority of schools. There had already been only limited scope in respect of voluntary aided schools but the emergence of new types of school has exacerbated the situation. The only way that the Council can exert influence is through negotiation and voluntary engagement and there may be limits to this due to the lack of a close relationship with MATs. In addition, the at least one school has attempted to expand even when there are surplus school places. It may therefore be the case that not all schools will be receptive to engagement.

5.19   Schools are likely to find themselves competing for pupils, with less popular schools becoming unsustainable. This will make it difficult to maintain a balanced range of school provision across the borough.

6. Church Schools

6.1 The Panel received evidence from representatives of both the London Diocesan Board, who are responsible for Church of England schools in the borough, and the Diocese of Westminster, who are responsible for Catholic schools.

London Diocesan Board

6.2 Mr. Woolf reported that the London Diocesan Board are responsible for a number of schools in Haringey. Their schools in the west of the borough are normally full but this is not currently the case. Schools in the east of the borough are generally less full. The Diocese is trying to keep all its schools open despite the drop in demand for places as it is thought that it is likely that demand will recover.

6.3 Entry to their schools is not just restricted to those from the Church of England and consideration is only given to religious affiliation if schools are oversubscribed. The Diocese works closely with the Council and regard themselves as being an integral part of Haringey schools. Some schools have expanded in recent years but are now finding it necessary to reduce the number of forms. Individual schools are left to determine for themselves how they achieve school improvement and how this is done is not dictated by the Diocese.

Diocese of Westminster

6.4 Mr. Spears stated that the Diocese of Westminster is a strategic partner of the Council in the provision of school places. They do not seek to dominate schools but offer a diversity of choice so that a wide range of schools are available. When schools are oversubscribed, Catholic children are prioritised. When schools are undersubscribed, all children are both welcomed and celebrated. In the past, families with a Catholic heritage would actively seek Catholic schools. Parents now seek schools that are good or outstanding and schools that do not achieve this are less attractive.

6.5 The perception that Catholic schools were just for the white middle classes was wrong as schools are very diverse and this applies to both pupils and staff. Support for schools is shared between the Diocese, the local authority and government. Schools either work with local authorities or bring in external support for school improvement. It was not something that the Diocese tries to do as they do not have the capacity to micro-manage.

Demand for School Places

6.6 The relationship with the Council is normally very positive. In respect of the downturn in demand for school places, the issue for the Diocese concerns the management of land. Mr. Spears felt that local authorities have choices in respect of provision and access to funds. If demand for school places increases again, they can re-invest in school places. The church has finite quantities of land and could lose resources permanently if schools close. A pilot project is taking place to explore the possibility of using school buildings in flexible ways. This will enable expansion to take place when demand for places increases again. The setting up of federations of schools is also being looked at as another

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option. Some schools have already joined together, which provides the opportunity to manage budgets more effectively.

6.7 Mr. Spears stated that the Diocese is also interested in hearing the ideas of the local authority in respect of the downturn in demand for places. There had previously been regular meetings between the Diocese with directors at the local authority but these are no longer happening.

6.8 The Diocese has looked at school rolls from a slightly different perspective and focused on who was going to schools as well as overall numbers. Although there are now fewer Catholic families, they are prepared to travel further to access Catholic education. Everyone had struggled with the introduction of new schools that were not part of the local plan. New providers had appeared and they had been able to provide new buildings as well. This was taking place whilst some Dioceses were struggling financially. They had been excluded from the free schools programme and unable to invest in long standing schools. Demand for school places went in cycles and there needed to be a new strategy, with built in flexibility.

Academisation

6.9 Mr. Spears stated that academisation involved groups coming together to support each other. It was necessary for schools to be of a certain size to become academies. It did not affect their relationship with the Church. Federations of academies that are supported by the Diocese replicate the academy chain model and the largest of these has 11 schools. He acknowledged that there was a lot of resistance to the academy process. There was felt to be a loss of identity and schools become accountable to another organisation. However, there were Catholic secondary schools that had become academies in Haringey and many people would not have noticed much difference.

6.10 Mr. Woolf reported that there were Church of England academies in the borough. A deliberate decision had been taken not to refer to them as academies though. The changes were structural and did not entail any change in the way that education was delivered in schools.

6.11 Mr. Spears reported that Catholic schools had their own admission criteria. Whilst priest's statements were not allowed to be used, religion and church attendance were considered as part of the application of admission criteria when schools were oversubscribed. Most relationships that the Diocese had been at officer level, where there were similar interests. They now sought to empower schools where before their role had been to negotiate with local authorities regarding capital funding. Other ways to engage with the community now needed to be found to compensate for the reduced closeness of the relationship with the local authority.

6.12 The Panel noted that pressure had been put on some Catholic schools in Haringey to convert to academies by the Diocese of Westminster. This had been exacerbated by a reduction in demand for places at Catholic schools in the borough. Academisation had been presented as being the only solution to falling rolls. Governors in voluntary aided schools nevertheless have significant powers. Schools cannot be forced to become academies, although they can be

pressurised. The impact of converting is not normally explained fully to governors, especially the changes in the composition of governing bodies and loss of powers.

6.13   The changes to schools that academisation entails may have been understated by the Diocesan authorities but they are significant in terms of accountability and transparency. They also further lessen the scope for there to be a coordinated response to the reduction in school rolls, which particularly threaten the viability of church schools as they are amongst those suffering from the biggest drops in demand for places. The Panel is of the view that the Council should work with the Diocese to ensure that school governing bodies are given clear and impartial guidance on the implications of academisation.

> *Recommendation:*
> That the Council work with the diocesan authorities to ensure that school governing bodies are given clear and impartial guidance on the implications of academisation or are signposted to sources of independent advice.

6.14   The Panel was concerned to hear the evidence of Mr. Spears that the relationship with the Council was now less close and that regular meetings between the Diocese and senior Council officers were not taking place.   It was nevertheless encouraging to hear that the Diocesan authorities are interested in hearing the ideas of the local authority regarding the downturn in demand for places.   It is therefore of the view that it is essential that further efforts are made to engage with the Diocesan authorities and re-establish close relationships.

> *Recommendation:*
> That action take place to re-establish close relationships between the Council and the diocesan authorities and collaborate closely with them in addressing the downturn in demand for school places

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7.   Schools Finance

7.1   Schools finance is complex and critical to successful and inclusive schools. Whilst schools seek value for money in every area of their work, it is currently a challenging financial landscape for them.

7.2   The Panel heard that the Council's Schools Finance team undertakes both statutory and non-statutory functions. The statutory role involves the distribution of government funding and provision of information regarding this to schools. The non-statutory role involves providing help to schools, especially those in financial difficulties. There were 12 of these last year and 13 applications were made for assistance. The increase in schools in financial difficulties is due to the impact of Covid and, in particular, the reduced income arising from this.

Dedicated Schools Grant

7.3   The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a ring-fenced government grant that supports local authorities' schools budgets. The DSG comprises four blocks:
- Schools;
- Early years;
- High needs; and
- Central schools services.

7.4   The Schools, Early Years and High Needs blocks are fully passported to education settings. The Central Block is retained by the Council for statutory central services. Statements are sent to schools well in advance of the start of the financial year and these details of indicative and final amounts of funding.

7.5   Mr. Smith reported that a fall in admissions could mean that schools found themselves with a staffing structure that their finances are not able to support and a loss of economies of scale. Schools have also recently lost a number of sources of income generation, such as breakfast and after school clubs and lettings, due to the impact of Covid. In addition, some schools have needed to hire agency teachers to cover teachers who were self-isolating. At the same time, financial overheads have not gone down.

7.6   Schools are allocated an amount in their base funding to cover provision for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) but this does not always meet the actual cost. It is the responsibility of schools to cover the first £6,000 of provision. The increase in the number of children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans has exacerbated the issue. Grant funding has also not kept pace with inflation.

7.7   The Schools Finance team provides support and training to schools. A report is prepared when schools find themselves in financial difficulties. Guidance, challenge and support are provided for schools granted a licensed deficit. In such circumstances, schools can receive cash flow advances. There is a restructure and scrutiny panel that considers such matters and reports are also made to the Schools Forum. The Council has a particular role in scrutinising restructuring applications that would result in redundancies as the local authority is responsible

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for meeting the cost of these, although they are not responsible for any costs arising from pension responsibilities.

7.8   Mr. Smith reported that his service has recently been restructured and there is now a post of Schools Finance Manager to provide some additional support to schools and school governors. In addition, a traded service is in the process of being developed that will supplement assistance currently provided.   The View My Financial Insights (VMFI) tool provides schools with a means of benchmarking their financial performance. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) can also provide free one-to-one support for schools. Good feedback has been obtained on this and it has generated some new ideas. In addition, there is also Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning (ICFP), which is a management process that helps schools plan the best curriculum for their pupils with the funding at their disposal. In respect of SEND, schools can access "top up" funding through an EHC plan if necessary.

7.9   If the number of SEND pupils at an individual school is disproportionately high, it is more challenging to cope with the financial demands.   Schools are getting better at identifying SEND children and this has resulted in an increase in their numbers.   There has also been a change in the statutory environment and funding is required for young people with EHC plans up to the age of 25. However, government funding had not changed to reflect these changes. The cumulative effect of this has been an overspend in the High Needs Block.

7.10   The Schools Forum meets five times per year and includes representatives from all educational settings in the borough.   Its formal role is to determine the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation to schools. The allocation in the Schools Block is to be increased in the forthcoming year after a decrease of 1.2% in the previous two years. The Central Block is decreasing by 2.5% per year. Funding for the High Needs Block has increased by 8% but demand has grown by 11%. The last outturn report on the DSG showed approximately 100% had been spent. There is a deficit of £6.8 million in the High Needs Block but £10.1 million of this has been accrued in previous years.

High Needs Block

7.11   The issues with the High Needs Block are national ones and a response has been made by the Council through London Councils. A proposed government White Paper on the issue has been twice put back. The current SEND review by the Council will take into account the funding issues. Early indications are that next years settlement will provide an allowance for the High Needs Block that is well above inflation but this was unlikely to be sufficient. Ms. Lyseight reported that the ESFA was currently looking at the issues relating to the DSG. The Council was also developing a DSG management plan and there was a clear need to address to deficit.

7.12   Schools with a disproportionate number of children with EHC plans can find themselves financially challenged. In such circumstances, there is a SEND contingency fund that they can apply for. Schools can qualify for this if their expenditure is 40% above notional spend. If it is 60% above, they may qualify for up to £3,000 per pupil.

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7.13 Quarterly feedback is received from schools on their finances and it is possible to identify emerging issues. Schools now experiencing difficulties include a number that are considered to be particularly well managed due to the impact of loss of income and falling rolls. There is a time delay in funding which can provide schools with the opportunity to adjust their staffing structure before income drops. The government has supported schools with funding to cover additional expenditure but no provision has been made for the loss of income due to Covid. Conversely, there are some schools where balances have increased. Some have reduced overheads whilst others have not been able to go ahead with planned capital expenditure. Schools have shown an overall balance of £3 million.

7.14 Panel Members commented that finance is a major influence on curriculum development. Schools might know what they need to do to improve but are unable to do it as they do not have sufficient money. School improvement plans therefore need to be designed so that they are affordable to schools. There is also currently no benchmarking on the actual levels of funding that schools have coming in and of per pupil expenditure. Schools can raise additional funds through fundraising, lettings and donations and some are better able to do this than others. Ms. Lyseight stated that the main focus was on income as this is within the area of Council control. The only way that the Council is made aware of the effect of income raising activities by schools is through them presenting healthy balances. Consideration could be given to what could be done to promote a more level playing field, such as sharing of expertise and knowledge.

7.15 The Panel has noted that there is currently no analysis of the cost effectiveness of schools and is of the view that work should be undertaken by the Council to develop a suitable offer of this for schools. Any assessment of cost effectiveness should consider all of the funding that is available to them.

Recommendation:
That an offer be developed for schools of an analysis of their cost effectiveness and that this is based on the totality of their income, including that from fund-raising activities and other additional sources.

7.16 Panel Members also commented that some schools have disproportionately high percentages of pupils with Special Needs and Disability (SEND). Information on why they are concentrated in some schools would provide greater clarity and felt that collaboration between schools could help support them. One way of assisting schools in ensuring they had the resources to address such needs would be for them to establish consortia. Ms Lyseight felt that developing consortia was an excellent idea as this could produce economies of scale. Mr. Smith commented that federated schools could in a better position to share resources. For example, they could have a shared Headteacher and/or Finance Manager and other back-office functions. It would also facilitate collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

7.17 The Panel is of the view that there would be merit in developing consortia of schools to buy in services as this could enable economies of scale to be achieved. It recommends that this be looked at through the Schools Forum and consideration given to how schools could be supported in developing them.

> **Recommendation:**
> That a report on the development of consortia of schools to buy in services be submitted to the Schools Forum and consideration given to how schools could be supported in developing them.

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