

## **REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL 21 JANUARY 2013**

The draft minutes of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel are herewith attached. The main items discussed were as follows:

### **1. SCHOOL STANDARDS**

We received a report from Avi Becker, Business Intelligence Manager from the Chief Executive's Service, on current statistics for school standards within the borough. He reported that although Haringey's performance in the early years foundation stage had improved, authorities elsewhere had improved more with the result that Haringey's relative position had deteriorated.

Jon Abbey, the Assistant Director for School Improvement, stated that performance needed to be improved so that it was at least in line with local counterparts. Panel Members were of the view that the relatively good performance of primary schools in the west of the borough disguised the true extent of the challenges faced by schools in the east. The Director of Children and Young People's Services stated that she was not complacent about the west of the borough. The authority was aware that it needed to focus its attention on early years and key stage 1 and consideration was being given to early interventions. One action that was being taken was to ensure that all those children who were eligible to a free nursery place were actually receiving it. A number of schools had also been challenged to improve their performance.

We were of the view that there was a need for the authority to encourage schools to be more ambitious. Many of the performance issues that had been raised had been known for some time and there was now a need for effective action to be taken in response. Schools in the east of the borough faced considerable challenges and these were likely to intensify but it was recognised that there were limits to how far the local authority could intervene.

We noted that trends within the test results had generally remained static but there had been good progress in the percentage of students that had progressed by two levels for English and Maths, where Haringey was 12<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> nationally. The provisional results for GCSEs had shown figures of 57.9% of students had attained 5+ A\*-C grades, including English and Maths, which was only marginally below the English average of 58.6%.

We noted that the government would be implementing changes so that from 2014 a BTEC would no longer be equivalent to 4 GCSEs at A\* to C. There had been some encouraging progress in closing the gaps in GCSE performance between the east and west of the borough. For example, performance for 5 GCSEs at A\* to C without English and Maths was better in the east than the west. It was also possible that Haringey's performance for 5 A\* to C GCSEs would be above the national average when the figures were confirmed.

We **AGREED**:

1. That plans by the local authority for the targeting of improvements within early years and key stage 1 be shared with the Panel when available; and
2. That data for GCSE performance showing the borough's performance compared to statistical and geographic neighbours be circulated to the Panel.

### **2. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

We noted the view of the Director of Children and Young People's Services that school improvement needed to provide a sufficiently sharp challenge to schools. In the past, there had perhaps been an over emphasis on maintaining good relationships with schools. A recent report to Cabinet had defined what the relationship between schools and the local authority should now be in the light of recent changes and there was now a specific and defined role for the local authority in providing challenge.

We noted that a school improvement strategy and plan was now being drafted, which would include the role of the local authority as well as school to school support. The work would need to be undertaken with fewer resources than previously as there was now only a small team. The work of the authority would be based on precise evidence gathering. Each school would be categorised within the plan based on OFSTED rating and intelligence and interventions would be led by this. The school improvement team would be able to both broker and implement support. Where appropriate and based on secure evidence, formal warning notices could be served on schools that were not performing up to standard. The strategy would be shared and consulted upon when completed.

We were of the view that strong and effective governing bodies were very important and noted that there was provision to take action where weaknesses in specific ones were identified. We felt that there should be some mechanism or fixed term to avoid ineffectual Chairs becoming sitting fixtures. We also felt that information and intelligence from parents needed to be gathered and used more effectively. Parents could be reluctant to comment due to fear of victimisation. It was nevertheless noted that there was the opportunity for parents to make comments via school websites or through parent questionnaires.

We felt that it was important that there were appropriate checks and balances within the management of schools. There was a need to persuade all schools of the benefits of scrutiny and accountability as it had been eroded in recent years. In particular, the position of Headteacher could become very powerful and school governing bodies needed to provide an effective counter balance to this. It was suggested that successful governing body Chairs could be used as mentors to others.

The Deputy Director of C&YPS (Prevention and Early Intervention) reported that schools now had more autonomy and the local authority role had changed accordingly. It was acknowledged that there was a need to strengthen governor support. It was accepted that there was also a need to listen to parents' views and the service would wish to report back to the Panel in due course on this issue.

**We AGREED:**

1. That the school improvement strategy be submitted to the Panel for comment when available;
2. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel on how parents' views are sought and incorporated in improvement plans; and

**We RECOMMEND:**

That the terms of governing bodies and Chairs be looked at to ensure that school governing bodies are refreshed and kept up to the highest quality.

### **3. SOCIAL WORK LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

We received a report from the Head of Organisational Development and Learning reported on the training and development of children's social workers. We noted that there was a rigorous process for ensuring that staff were appropriately trained. There were currently approximately 360 social work staff employed by the Council. 80-85% were now permanent staff.

The Panel noted the following:

- Training was open to all and some parts of it were compulsory, such as supervision for managers;
- 12 days training per year was allocated to each member of staff;
- Retention rates for staff were improving;
- Sickness absence rates were currently 8.5 days per member of staff per year. The service was aiming to improve this by reducing the average by one day; and
- Staff who benefitted from training were obliged to remain at the Council for two years or repay the money spent on their training.

The Panel felt that it was important that social workers visited provision used by the Council for children as part of their induction so they had an awareness of where children are likely to be placed. Visits would also ensure that they knew of the good quality of services that were provided.

**We RECOMMEND:**

That the Children and Young People's Service be requested to include, within the learning and development framework, a requirement for social workers to visit provision used by the Council for children as part of their induction programme.