

Minutes

For: Admissions and Place Planning Forum

Date: 11.03.2021

Time: 16:00-18:00

Location: Video Conference

Attendees:

Chair

Councillor Sarah Ruiz: Cabinet Member for Education and Children Social Care (SR)

Councillor Jane Lofthouse: Deputy Cabinet Member for Education (JL)

Local Authority Officers

Peter Gibb: Head of Access and Infrastructure (PG)

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

Roz Pither, Interim Head of 0-25 SEND Service (RP)

Ruth Gibbs, Group Manager 0-25 SEND Service (RG)

Clerk

Kiran Parkash Singh: Pupil Services

Representatives: Maintained primary schools

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School

Kate McGee: Head Teacher, Manor Primary School

James Dawson: Head Teacher, Winsor Primary School

Sue Ferguson: Head Teacher, Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

Representatives: Maintained secondary schools

Ian Wilson: Co-Head Teacher, Little Ilford Primary School

Representatives: Academy Primary Schools

Paul Harris: CEO Tapscott Trust

Representatives: Academy secondary schools

Peter Whittle: Associate Principal, Langdon Academy (Brampton Manor Trust)

Simon Elliott: CEO Community School Trust

Representative: Foundation schools

Anthony Wilson: Head Teacher, Lister Community School and CEO Newham Community Schools Trust

Representative: University Technical Colleges

Geoffrey Fowler: Principal, London Design and Engineering UTC

Faith Representative: Catholic schools

Chris McCormack: Head Teacher, St. Bonaventure's
Gael Hicks: Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust

Faith Representative: Church of England schools

Matt Hipperson: Head Teacher, St. Luke's Church of England Primary School

Looked After Children Representative: Virtual School

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

Representative: Alternative provisions

Sandy Davies: Head Teacher, Education Links

Apologies:

Charlotte Robinson: Head Teacher, Rokeby School (boys only)
Quintin Peppiatt: New Vision Trust
David Perks: East London Science School
Jo Aylett: Head Teacher, Edith Kerrison Nursery School and Children's Centre
John Blaney: Principal, Royal Docks Academy (Burnt Mills Trust)

Key

Secondary Head Teacher – SHT
Primary Head Teacher - PHT

Action Points

1. Welcome and Introductions

a. Local authority officers to invite representatives from the independent education sector to attend relevant future head teacher meetings.

2. Minutes of last minutes and matters arising

a. TJ to circulate the local authority's response to the draft School Admissions Code consultation.

b. TJ to send reminder to own admission authority school regarding determination.

5. Pupil place planning

Places for All strategy and the opening of new schools updates in Newham to be updated on periodically at local authority and head teacher meetings.

6f. Composite Prospectuses

Schools to contact TJ for expressions of interest to be the featured school or to nominate another.

7. Education and Health Care Plans

RP and RG to work with schools to formulate an effective practice local protocol to manage the process of consulting schools as part of the statutory assessment for EHCPs.

Agenda Item 1. Welcome, introductions and membership

1. Chair SR introduced herself as the new Cabinet lead member for Education and Children's Social Care. SR welcomed attendees to the second virtual forum of the 2020-2021 academic year. SR asked forum members to introduce themselves and explain what type of school they were representing. SR thanked forum members for the time and effort they have put in to make the forum a productive body that supported the formulation of admissions and place planning policies. Apologies were forwarded for members who were unable to attend today.

a. Membership

1. SR asked the forum if all types of schools were represented and in the right proportion. All agreed that the membership of the forum reflected the balance of the type of schools in the borough.

2. TJ advised that the terms of reference were in place but were being slightly revised. The new version will be circulated in due course to be signed off at the next forum meeting.

3. SR sought the views of the forum about the current vacant positions. Vacancies currently exist for Christian and Islamic faith and non-denominational representatives from the independent sector. TJ advised the forum that the independent sector have already been working closely with the local authority on other aspects of education such as data sharing.

4. A PHT asked if it was necessary for there to be three vacancies for 11 independent schools in the borough. There should only be one representative. PG also queried if the content of the forum is relevant for independent schools. They should be invited to other local authority head teacher meetings that may cover other elements of education related aspects such as safeguarding. All members of the forum agreed to this.

Agenda Item 2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising:

1. The minutes of the previous forum meeting were reviewed. All present confirmed that it was an accurate recording of the discussions.

2. The action points from the previous meeting were reviewed.

2a. Hosting secondary school virtual tours on the Newham website.

1. TJ advised that this had proved very successful and there had been positive feedback from residents. Not all schools had provided their tour details to host. Parents had found it very useful but in order for it to be more useful, all schools need to participate.

2b. Independent sector vacancies – covered above.

2c. Draft Admissions Code consultation response.

1. TJ advised that the consultation from the DfE was very different to previous. Rather than asking for a narrative by way of response, the DfE asked set questions for respondents to answer. There is more of a focus on vulnerable children and fair access which was welcomed. In light of the new Code, the Fair Access Protocol will need to be re-drafted to take into account changes to the statutory fair access categories. Working groups will be set up to work on this.

2. The local authority has already provided a robust response which supports the changes but have requested more. The new code was due to be implemented in January 2021 but this has been delayed. TJ has contacted the DfE who have advised that this has been delayed due to the high levels of responses to the consultation.

3. Whilst it was disappointing that the new Code had been delayed, TJ felt that it was positive as the DfE has acknowledged that the current Code is weak particularly around fair access, therefore they want to ensure that they address all responses to their consultation. TJ will circulate the local authority's response.

2d. Own admission authority school appeals.

1. TJ advised that the local authority has contacted own admission authority schools about the offer to prepare and present appeal cases for places at their school. In addition to this, local authority's appeal statement template was also circulated for use a previously concerns had been raised about the level of detail contained in the statements. Schools were providing stronger responses as part of the verbal case at the actual appeal hearings but the statement could be stronger.

2e. Places For All strategy. PG will provide update as part of the agenda item.

2f. Own admission authority school admission arrangements determination.

1. TJ informed the forum that the local authority has not received the arrangements from schools that have not adopted the local authority's determined arrangements. Academies that have adopted the local authority's admission arrangements do not need to do anything. A reminder will be sent to schools.

Agenda Item 3. Department for Education – Statutory Consultation

Covered in 2c of agenda item 2.

Agenda Item 4. Primary to Secondary Transition

a. Overview of outcome for September 2021

1. SR thanked all schools for their hard work to ensure that the process ran smoothly in what has been a difficult year and for schools doing what they can to support families when social distancing and lockdown rules made it difficult for the process to continue as it would during normal circumstances. The main headline from this year was that there had been an improvement in parental preference outcomes on last year.

2. TJ added that this was in part due to the expansion of a number of secondary schools in the borough. 66.84% of applicants were offered a place at their first preference school and overall 90.71% got one of their first three preferred schools. Every child has been offered a school place but the authority is still expecting a number of appeals.

3. TJ asked the forum if they had any questions based on the datasets that have been circulated based on this year's outcomes. No questions. TJ added that she had been working with a secondary school to identify why families who attend a local primary school had not applied for a place their local secondary school. Primary and secondary schools should look at working together to advise families to name at least one local secondary school. If parents decide not name a local school then that should be fed back to the secondary school so that they can address the reasons and any perceptions about the school.

4. PG added that in terms of the numbers it is hard to judge what impact the pandemic has had in terms of family circumstances changing and moving out of Newham. Data had shown that 70 families had moved out of Newham after submitting secondary school applications. It was therefore possible that they may move back. In addition to this, TJ added that currently there were 31 year 6 children on elective home education, and it possible that they may apply for a secondary school. In addition there are around 100 children with a Newham address on roll at Newham primary schools for whom an application had not been received. It was possible therefore that the authority could receive a further 200 applications.

5. A SHT added that from their experiences there were still families abroad who have not been able to return or are not planning to return after travelling abroad during the pandemic. There may be a surge in applications when border restrictions are lifted. A PHT added that the data showed that the authority was in a reasonably comfortable position but need to be aware that that some children may come back into the system. There may also be a need to look at the impact of refugee children as it is uncertain if they will still be in the borough by September.

b. Monitoring and tracking alternative allocations.

1. SR advised that the first part of the process was complete as families have their named school, but now it was important to ensure that all children attend in September and for some schools in the past this has proven difficult, due to the number children offered a place as an alternative allocation, where parents are not happy with the allocated school.

2. TJ advised that this was broader than in previous years as the number of schools involved in the alternative allocation process has increased. And some schools which have never been involved in the process previously will do so for the first time and therefore may need support. It was important that schools remained positive when engaging with these families, even if parents are not so that the child does not feel any negativity towards attending that school.

3. TJ added she was happy to work with schools to look at different strategies to encourage families to engage and to ensure that all children attend school at the start of the new academic year in September. SR asked if it was the schools' responsibility to ensure children are on roll as it is big undertaking for some schools. TJ advised that it was.

4. TJ explained that under the current climate it was difficult for secondary schools to arrange visits for families. Perhaps primary schools could help families to engage with the secondary school who could provide promotional information which could be sent to families to provide details of the benefits of attending their school.

5. A SHT asked if there had been any changes in parents seeking a particular school based on the online/virtual learning opportunities in the past year. TJ advised there was nothing of note but there was evidence that families' opinions change over time once they hear good things about the school. The SHT said that schools should capitalise on that. Secondary schools make a good offer of online/virtual learning platforms and that should be used as a selling point.

6. TJ queried about the induction date for current year 6 children. A PHT added that there was a lot of uncertainty with induction days and it needs to be discussed at a wider panel. Primary schools may be planning a number of events over the summer term as year 6 pupil had already missed out on a lot of events and opportunities and that they would normally have. A SHT added that the date will be set by Newham Association of Secondary Head Teachers (NASH) and that will be circulated to primary schools but also consideration will be given to what events primary schools have planned to avoid a clash.

c. Secondary Transition – September 2022

1. TJ advised that at the moment it was uncertain what the picture will be in September in terms of what transition events will be permitted. Virtual tours had proved popular so schools should continue with that as well as the open events if permitted. A PHT stated that in previous meetings the forum had discussed the possibility of starting the year 7 application process in the previous summer term when children are in year 5. Is this still an option for admission in September 2022? TJ advised that this will have to be deferred to next year for admission in September 2023. In addition to this the composite prospectuses for September 222 will include more information about Covid-19 related issues such as virtual tours and online meetings.

2. A SHT added that virtual tours had proved very successful with school websites receiving a higher number of hits than what a school would normally get through the door on an open evening. However whilst the process cannot start in year 5 this year, schools should look at aspects such as publishing virtual tours earlier. Schools should continue with online tours, parents can access them at any time and it can help change their perception of certain schools. Rather than waiting to be invited to a physical tour they can see what a school can offer from home.

Agenda Item 5. Pupil Place Planning

1. PG updated the forum that the local authority was in the process of recruiting a new place planning officer following the departure of the previous incumbent, Manjit Bains.

2. The latest version of the Places for All strategy was agreed at Cabinet in November 2020. The updates focussed on ensuring the strategy was based on the most accurate local planning and growth forecasts.

3. The proposed expansion of primary schools have temporarily been put on hold as these places are not yet required. Whilst places will be needed in the next 5-10 years, based on expected forecasts, the demand will only be in certain parts of Newham and not across the borough. This is in contrast to what the situation is in other parts of London. An update will be provided at the next forum after national offer day for primary schools in April.

4. A PHT asked whether there was a need to look at Covid-19 related changes to the birth rates in the borough. They also added that there was a need to look at primary schools opening when there is no demand for places in the borough at the current time, especially in areas where there are sufficient places. PG advised that the local authority cannot control when new schools open. This is agreed between the education provider and the DfE. There is some dialogue with the local authority when there is no need, hence why the newest primary school to open in September will be doing so as a one form entry school.

5. PH added that further primary free schools are planned in the next 5-10 years linked to new housing developments and the authority will continue to discuss this with the Forum over the next few years to discuss what needs to be considered, including the selection process for new free school providers. A PHT added that the authority needed to learn from previous years' experiences where new schools have opened at the expense of existing schools whose numbers are falling. The local authority needs to ensure that they submit a strong case to the DfE when such discussions take place when places are not yet needed.

6. PG stated that the planned expansion of a number of secondary schools and the opening of a new secondary free school in the borough are needed in order to meet the demand for secondary schools places. The local authority will be monitoring the situation carefully.

7. The Forum agreed that the Places for All strategy and plans for the opening of new schools should be raised periodically at other head teachers forums and meetings and not just at Admissions Forum.

Agenda Item 6. Standing Items

a) New academy conversions and proposed new free schools

1. TJ advised the forum that Eastlea Community School converted to an academy on 1st January 2021 and joined the Newham Community Schools Trust.

2. PG advised that the new special free school should open between September 2022 and September 2023 subject to progress by DfE.

b) Consultations

1. None

c. Objections to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA)

1. TJ advised the panel that there had been no recent cases from the OSA that impacted Newham directly. However a discrimination challenge was submitted to the OSA in relation to grammar schools where it was claimed that an unfair advantage was being gained by some families who could afford to pay for private tuition in order to gain a place. The challenge was not upheld.

d. Determination of admission arrangements

1. Covered in 2f.

e. Transition processes for normal admissions

1. Covered in agenda item 4.

f. Composite Prospectus

1. SR advised that the local authority was seeking expressions of interest to be the featured school for both primary and secondary of the autumn 2021 editions of the composite prospectus. Rokeby School is featured in the current secondary school edition and Manor Primary School as the last primary school featured.
2. Schools should contact TJ to express an interest or nominate another school to be promoted in this year's prospectuses.

Agenda Item 7. Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP)

1. This agenda item was requested by a PHT who had concerns about the process in which schools were consulted to be the named school on an EHCP. It was felt that a fair and transparent policy was needed to determine when a school is named when it is not in line with parental preference. What consideration is given when schools already have a high number of pupils under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice, with or without an EHCP?
2. Another PHT added that there had been an increase in the number of children with EHCPs moving to reception class but there are children already in school still waiting. They also added to the concern that there did not appear to be a transparent policy about how decisions are made. A third PHT added that schools that are undersubscribed (not full) were being impacted by the decision making as they were being approached to be named as they have vacancies. Is there a protocol for naming a school?
3. RP presented slides outlining how the local authority can make decisions in relation to EHCPs. She advised the forum that the local authority does not have a local protocol that determines how schools are named on an EHCP. Schools are named within the national legal framework of the Equalities Act and DfE's SEND Code of Practice. Whilst there is a degree of local flexibility, there can be none around schools' concerns about disproportionality. The local authority must comply with parental preference unless it would be considered to be incompatible with the efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources.
4. In addition to this where parent/carers have requested a place in a mainstream school but the local authority is of the opinion that a non-mainstream placement to be more suitable, they must consider what adaptations can be made to the mainstream setting in order for the child to be admitted.
5. Where the parent/carer has not expressed a preference for a school, the local authority must specify a mainstream provision unless it is against parental wishes or considered to be incompatible with the efficient education of others. In addition mainstream education cannot be refused on the grounds that it is not suitable.
6. RP then outlined the consultation process all local authorities must follow before the EHCP is finalised and a school is named. School should respond within 15 days of the consultation. The local authority must consider the response to the consultation. However if there is no response then school can be named. A PHT added that consultations were being sent during non-term time. SENCOs were having to work during holidays to provide a response. RP advised that local authorities were bound by statutory guidance that does not take into account term times or school days, other than the summer holidays.

7. RP notified the panel that currently a high number of EHCPs were being drafted. 2,500 children in receipt of High Needs Funding (HNF) in Newham will be issued with an EHCP but this will take time. In addition new in pupils admitted in year but without an EHCP will not be given HNF. Funding will only be made available via the EHCP process. Schools will need to make use of SEND notional fund (up to £10,000 per child) and the Age Weighted Pupil Funding (AWPU). This new local process brings Newham in line with the national position where funding is linked to the EHCP.

8. RP advised that the key priority of the local authority is to streamline the statutory assessment process and speed up the timescales in order to meet EHCP deadlines as outlined in law. In addition to this, whilst ultimately the local authority is bound by law, there perhaps is a need to look at the consultation process where parental preference has not been expressed to ensure there is cross range of local schools being consulted.

9. A PHT asked if a school responds to a consultation by advising that they believe they should not be named, what would happen. RP advised that the local authority will give due consideration to the response before making a decision. However a school advising that they shouldn't be named does not automatically mean that they will not be named.

10. A SHT stated that more clarity was needed on the process were a parent/carer has not expressed a preference. RP advised that the local authority and schools can work together to develop an effective practice local protocol to manage this which can take into account the number of pupils already on roll with HNFs, EHCPs etc.

Agenda Item 8. Any other business, items for next meeting

a. Terms of Reference

1. SR advised the forum that TJ will circulate the Terms of Reference before the next forum for review and comment.

b. Induction days

1. Covered in Agenda item 4b

c. Fair Access Working Group membership

1. TJ requested expressions of interest to join the Fair Access working group to revise the local authority Fair Access protocol once the DfE new School Admissions Code goes live.

Agenda Item 9. Date of next meeting and close

1. The provisional date for the next meeting has been set 13th May 2021. Forum members were asked to add to their diaries.

2. SR closed the meeting by thanking schools for working hard in challenging circumstances to get schools operating as normally as possible during this academic year and for also giving their time to the forum and making a valuable contribution to formulating local admissions policies.

Meeting Closed 17:30

End.