

# Minutes

**For:** Admissions and Place Planning Forum

**Date:** 13.03.2023

**Time:** 15:30-17:30

**Location:** Video Conference

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## Attendees:

### Chair

Councillor Joshua Garfield: Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (JG)

### Local Authority Officers

Vik Verma: Director of Education (VV)

Peter Gibb: Head of Education Access and Infrastructure (PG)

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

Ada Egot: Commissioner Education Place Planning (AE)

### Clerk

Kiran Parkash Singh: Admissions and Appeals Team Leader (Primary)

### Representatives: Maintained primary schools

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School

James Dawson: Head Teacher, Winsor Primary School

Kate McGee: Head Teacher, Stratford Manor Primary School and Nursery

### Representatives: Maintained secondary schools

Vacant

### Representatives: Academy Primary Schools

Paul Harris: CEO Tapscott Trust

### Representatives: Academy secondary schools

Anthony Wilson: CEO Newham Community Learning Trust

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

### Representative: Voluntary Controlled schools

Vacant

### Representative: Infant and junior schools

Sine Brown: Head Teacher, Godwin Junior School

### Representative: Nursery schools

Jo Aylett: Head Teacher, Edith Kerrison Nursery School and Children's Centre

**Faith Representative: Catholic schools**

Chris McCormack: Head Teacher, St. Bonaventure's

Nuala Cashell: CEO Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust

**Faith Representative: Church of England schools**

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

**Representative: University Technical Colleges**

Geoffrey Fowler: Principal, London Design and Engineering UTC

**Representative: Virtual School**

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

**Representative: Alternative provisions**

Sandy Davies: Head Teacher, Education Links

**Apologies:**

Councillor Mariam Dawood: Deputy Cabinet Member for Education

Caroline Stone: Head Teacher, New City Primary School

Ekhlas Rahman: Community Schools Trust

Emma Gleeson: Learning in Harmony Trust

Jo Aylett: Head Teacher, Edith Kerrison Nursery School and Children's Centre

Keri Edge: Agate Momentum Trust and NLE

Rachel McGowan: Head Teacher, Plashet School

John Blaney: Assistant CEO, Royal Docks Academy (Burnt Mills Trust)

**Key**

Secondary Head Teacher – SHT

Primary Head Teacher - PHT

## Action Points

### **1. Re-designation of school status**

Local authority to contact the DfE regarding the possibility of schools (maintained or academy) changing their designation. E.G. from mainstream to special school status.

### **2. Normal admissions secondary school alternative allocations**

Local authority to produce a 'heat map' detailing how alternative allocations (children who were not offered one of their preferred schools and were allocated the nearest school with a vacancy) were carried out for admission in September 2023.

### **3. London Borough of Newham Admission Arrangements 2025**

Forum members to contact Tracy Jones with comments/suggestions for potential amendments to the admission arrangements for admission from September 2025.

### **4. Composite Prospectus – Expression of interest/comments**

Schools interested in being the promoted schools in the September 2023 version of the London Borough of Newham's composite prospectus to contact Tracy Jones.

Forum members to contact Tracy Jones with comments/ideas for possible changes to be included in the prospectuses.

### **5. SEND Place Planning**

SEND Place Planning to be a substantive agenda item at the next Admissions and Place Planning Forum (14.06.2023).

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## **Agenda Item 1. Welcome, introductions and membership**

1. Chair JG opened the second forum of the 2022-2023 academic year by introducing himself and welcoming the new members to the forum.

- o Rachel McGowan: Plashet School (Maintained)
- o Ekhlas Rahman: Community Schools Trust
- o Caroline Stone: Boleyn Trust
- o Emma Gleeson: Learning in Harmony Trust
- o Keri Edge: Agate Momentum Trust Leader and NLE
- o Sine Brown: Godwin Junior School (Maintained)
- o Nuala Cashell: CEO Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust

Apologies were forwarded for members who were unable to attend today.

2. JG thanked the Sue Ferguson, head teacher of Ellen Wilkinson Primary School who had decided to step down from being a forum member. Sue has been a forum member since 2016 and has made a valuable contribution to the development of LB Newham's Admissions and Place Planning strategies and policies.

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

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

The action points from the previous meeting with updates were included on the forum agenda. There were no comments or questions from forum members.

### Agenda Item 3. Education Place Planning

1. PG opened this agenda item by advising the forum that it was agreed at the last forum that there would be a full discussion at this term's forum relating to concerns about low and falling rolls. PG explained that this issue was not exclusive to LB Newham but other local authorities across London were also in a similar situation. To address this, the local authority is working with schools to consider what options are available to ensure schools remain financially viable.

2. AE introduced a presentation outlining the current situation and future projections.

3. Based on the 2022 borough forecasts, it is estimated that there will be a 9% decrease in primary pupil numbers by 2026, resulting in an increase in capacity in the primary phase. This has been partly due to a falling birth rate, but the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit have also been contributory factors.

4. Falling rolls can lead to financial instability which can result in schools facing deficits in their budgets. Whilst there is funding support available to schools with falling rolls, this would only be granted to schools where it can be demonstrated that there will be an increase in demand for school places within the next three years. The current forecast does not reflect that.

5. There has also been a steep decline in roll numbers in Christian faith schools across London. This appears to be a direct consequence of Brexit. The DfE will be contacting Dioceses to ask if there are any other contributory reasons for this decline.

6. The overall projected decline could mean that there is a risk that it may become necessary to close schools if action is not taken.

7. The planning areas of concern are;

- East Ham
- Manor Park
- Plaistow
- Stratford West Ham

8. The local authority has already started taking action and permanent PAN reductions have been agreed with the following schools from September 2024

- Avenue Primary School
- Calverton Primary School
- Upton Cross Primary School

9. A PHT asked if the significant housing developments in Stratford been factored in to the forecast. AE advised that the completed developments have not produced a pupil yield. The developments consisted mainly of 1-2 bedroom properties. Many 3 bedroom properties remain unoccupied.

10. A PHT stated that affordability is a factor. What has the local authority done to counter rising rent prices in the borough? JG advised that the Council is committed to building 1,000 new homes by the end of this term. Currently there were 30,000 on the waiting list for a home but in the current political climate, this is the maximum the council can do.

11. In addition to this, any new development plans must include at least 35% of properties being affordable social housing. The local plan reviewed this and are proposing to change

this to 50%. However this will not affect the current place planning strategy as future builds under the new proposals will have a 5-10 year build time.

12. A SHT suggested that the primary forecast needs to be rolled forward to assess the impact on secondary schools. AE advised that this was in the forecast shared in June 2022. This looked at the 7 year forecast for secondary schools and has suggests that the fall in numbers will continue in secondary schools. The updated forecast will include secondary schools too.

13. PG advised that it is not possible to forecast too far ahead in the future with a high degree of accuracy. The impact of Brexit and the pandemic made it necessary to review previous forecasts. AE confirmed that whatever decisions are made regarding place planning strategy the forum will be involved.

14. A PHT asked that previously schools capacities were increased to meet demand, now there are suggestions that schools should be capped because of a fall in demand. How confident were the local authority with their existing forecast?

15. PG advised that place planning forecast was not a complete science. The local authority has refined the modelling to increase confidence in the forecast. The key change to the modelling was the focus on housing, which had not produced the expected pupil yield. The previous formula used to determine the strategy was over generous in assessing the demand and had a Pan London focus. The new formula has a more local focus and has factored in Brexit and the fall in the birth rate.

16. A PHT asked if the reception application data that was circulated to schools reflected the permanent PAN reductions that a number of schools had agreed to. PG advised that the PAN reductions will be from September 2024. Admission in September 2023 will be based on the current PANs.

17. A SHT asked whether the local authority had contacted the DfE to find out if it would be possible to change a school's designation i.e. from mainstream to special school status. PG advised that this was not something any local authority could as they are no longer permitted to open schools. This could be checked with the DfE and if it is, whether this could be done outside of the DfE free school wave.

18. A PHT asked what the deadline was to express an interest in implementing a temporary cap. PG advised that the local authority will be contacting schools after primary national offer day (17<sup>th</sup> April 2023), for a decision to be made by half term in May.

19. TJ added that it is not possible to express an interest before national offer day as the local authority must offer places up to the PAN as agreed in the determined admission arrangements for admission from September 2023. A resident could challenge the admissions process if we reduce the PAN before all offers are made.

20. A PHT asked if it was possible to publish the PAN but then state that it may be reviewed at a later stage based on applications. TJ stated that PANs have to be set at what was consulted on but if a school wanted to permanently reduce their PAN they could do so via formal consultation for future admissions, which would be reflected in the determined admission arrangements.

21. A SHT asked what the process would be for secondary schools who request to temporarily cap their numbers. PG advised that previously the local authority has supported

schools with agreeing temporary caps following Ofsted inspections highlighting concerns. These were not permanent PAN reductions and could be reversed if there was an increase in demand.

22. A PHT asked what the process and timeframe is for closing schools should that become necessary, as they have done in the past. PG advised that there would be a significant lead time and that the local authority would have to go through a full consultation process. It may also have to be phased in, i.e. not admitting into the reception year group. The links below outline the legislative framework, process and timescales involved in closing schools

[Opening and closing maintained schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) see pages 22 and 23

[The School Organisation \(Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools\) Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

[Academies: making significant changes or closure by agreement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

23. AE added that a lot would depend on the consultation process and what the community would want. It could be a phased closure or an instant one.

24. A PHT asked what criteria will be used if more schools in a single planning area want to permanently reduce their PAN. PG advised that the authority would need to look at the roll data, and what would create the least instability. Currently there is a policy for temporary capping but the local authority is now proposing implementing permanent PAN reductions. Once the policy has been drafted, the local authority will consult with the forum with their proposals.

25. Referring back to the presentation AE advised the forum that further planning area meetings with school leaders have been planned in the summer term to decide the way forward.

26. In relation to secondary schools, following the recent expansions and the additional PAN increases at two schools, there is now sufficient capacity to meet demand in year 7 for September 2023. It is expected that the trends seen in primary will be seen in secondary as the gradually decreasing primary rolls filter through. The 2022 borough forecasts estimates a 5% decrease in Year 7 pupil numbers by 2026 in comparison to the recent October census figures.

27. AE added that whilst it shows that there is no immediate action required, schools are being asked to consider the impact of over allocation as Year 7 numbers start to decline.

#### **Agenda item 4. Primary to secondary transition for September 2023**

1. PG thanked all schools for supporting the local authority to ensure that the statutory national offer day target was met. Over 90% of applicants received one of their first to third preferences. Other than a concentration of places in a small number of schools, most secondary schools in the borough were full.

2. JG also passed on his gratitude to schools for supporting the application process in time for national offer day. Their contribution meant that the vast majority of applications were made online which meant that local authority officers spent less time managing paper applications.

3. A SHT raised a query about the process the local authority uses to allocate places to applicants who have not been offered any of their preferences (nearest school with a place available). He believed the current process was unfair as some schools received over 80 alternative allocations whilst another received two. This leads to the concentration of school places in a small number of schools in certain parts of the borough and creates long term inconveniences for families and schools.

4. It would be helpful if a heat map of how the alternative allocations were carried out could be produced.

5. TJ addressed this point by advising that she has not come across a local authority that uses a different system to allocating the nearest school with a vacancy. The current system put the child at the centre of decision making and has a rationale behind it that residents understand.

6. The local authority does also contact families of children who have been allocated the nearest school with a vacancy the day after national offer day to advise of other schools that have vacancies and inviting families to apply for these schools. This gives them the option to change the school that has been allocated. The number of families that change the allocated school in previous years has actually been relatively small.

7. A PHT asked about the process of identifying schools for children with EHCPs. In previous years there have been a number of cases where a child with an EHCP has not had a secondary school named on their Plan and have had to remain at their primary school.

8. TJ advised that Education Access officers work closely with colleagues in the 0-25 SEND Service to identify the children with SEND and the schools that have been named on their Plans. However, children can be issued with EHCPs at any time and therefore it is possible that the named schools can change or that a suitable school has not yet been identified due to the needs outlined in the draft Plan.

9. PG added that the opening of the Connaught Special School and the expansion of John F Kennedy School in Beckton should ease this issue but it is possible that some places may not become available until October.

10. A SHT asked what the local authority had done to discourage schools from over allocating when the data has shown that there isn't a need to do so. Will they be speaking to the DfE to determine what powers they have if any to prevent it?

11. The forum were advised that the local authority is opening up dialogue with the schools about this. Newham is not unique in this situation and it is an issue across London. Local authority powers are somewhat limited to prevent schools from over allocating.

12. TJ added that the local authority is also monitoring the position in all through schools (schools that have both primary and secondary year groups). Children in year 6 at an all through school can stay on in year 7 without the need of submitting an application. However, there isn't anything preventing parent/carers applying for other secondary schools, effectively meaning they can hold two year 7 offers. Both schools will have to hold the places open until the parent/carer makes a decision.

## 5. Standing items

**a) New academy conversions and proposed new free schools**

1. TJ advised that there were no new conversions and none currently planned. Connaught Special School will be opening in September 2023.

**b) Proposed consultations for September 2025 entry.**

1. PG advised that the arrangements for 2024 have been consulted on and the only change is to the PANs of a number of primary schools. No changes are planned for 2025 admission however, forum members were invited to contact the local authority with suggestions if they believe that changes need to be made.

**c) Annual item: composite prospectuses**

1. The forum were advised that work will begin on drafting the September 2023 editions of the composite prospectus in the summer term. Schools interested in being the promoted as the cover schools should contact the local authority to express an interest.

2. TJ added that there had been a request to increase the promotion of primary schools in the We Are Going To School edition. Schools will be contacted about what will be required and the timescales involved.

3. PVI and independent schools have also requested they be added to the circulation list to receive hard copies of the prospectuses. However, as these are currently funded by schools, they would need to pay for any additional print runs.

**5. Any other business**

PG advised that the summer forum will have a focus on SEND Place Planning.

Meeting Closed 17:00

End.

Date of next meeting: 14.06.2023