

# Minutes

**For:** Admissions and Place Planning Forum

**Date:** 11.03.2024

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

**Location:** Video Conference

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## **Attendees:**

**Chair:** Cllr Sarah Ruiz - Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Education (SR)

## **Local Authority Officers**

Annabel Bates: Director of Education (AB)

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

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

Ada Egot: Commissioner Education Place Planning (AE)

## **Clerk**

Cassandra Phillip: Admissions and Appeals Team Leader (Secondary)

## **Representative: Nursery schools**

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

## **Representatives: Maintained primary schools**

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters 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

Emma Gleeson: Learning in Harmony Trust

## **Representatives: Academy secondary schools**

Anthony Wilson: CEO Newham Community Learning Trust

Craig Hewitt: Head Teacher, Stratford School Academy

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

Simon Elliott: CEO Community Schools Trust

## **Representative: Voluntary Controlled schools**

Vacant

**Representative: Infant and junior schools**

Sine Brown: Head Teacher, Godwin Junior School

**Faith Representative: Church of England schools**

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

**Faith Representative: Catholic Schools**

Chris McCormack: Head Teacher, St. Bonaventure's

Nuala Cashell: Our Lady of Grace Academy Trust

**Representative: Virtual School**

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

**Apologies:**

Keri Edge: CEO Agate Momentum Trust

Caroline Stone: Head Teacher, New City Primary School

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

Chair SR opened the meeting by introducing herself as the Cabinet Lead for Education.

**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 account of the discussions.

**Agenda Item 3. Update on actions from last meeting**

Responses to the action points from the previous meeting were included on the Forum agenda and briefly discussed.

**Agenda Item 3.1. Forum vacancy: Primary community school**

KM provided an update regarding filling the current vacant forum position primary community school head teachers.

**Agenda Item 3.2. Spider diagram map of year 7 2024 EHCP admission offers by school**

Acknowledgement of included spider diagram map of year 7 September 2024 EHCP offers and table detailing number of placements at each school at national offer day.

**Agenda Item 3.3 SEND capital funding expression of interest**

PG gave an update. The deadline was a few weeks ago and LA had received strong, creative bids. The council expected to provide provisional outcomes to applicants by the end of spring term.

**Agenda Item 3.4 Primary phase capping: Expressions of interest process**

PG advised that the deadline for capping was brought forward in response to Forum feedback, to support schools in planning staffing for the next academic year. The deadline for responses was 11 March 2024 and the council will respond to EOIs by the end of the spring term.

**Agenda Item 3.5 Out of year group process flow proposals**

It was suggested and agreed that as there are many items on today's agenda, this item will be discussed at a future Forum meeting.

**Agenda Item 3.6 Over-allocation**

Much discussion took place over the pros and cons of schools over-allocating places above PAN. There was not a consensus on whether this practice should continue and discussions will continue at the next Forum and at NASCL.

**Agenda Item 4. Review primary to secondary transition figures for September 2024 entry**

TJ confirmed that the primary to secondary statistics were sent to all schools and hoped that the data was useful to schools in showing local patterns. Unfortunately the information cannot be sent in Microsoft Excel as the formulas use confidential pupil data however TJ requested that ICT help enable the Microsoft Excel for future statistics.

PH asked when the accompanying data would be ready for reception entry. TJ confirmed that the statistics would be circulated to all school leaders on 15 April 2024.

## **Agenda Item 5. Place planning forecast update and discussions on options for sustainability**

Place planning update was presented by PG. He had recently attended a London wide conference about falling pupil numbers and there was useful learning about the different ways those challenges were being managed elsewhere.

For Newham, there is an immediate challenge to manage the falling rolls the LA is experiencing. The council needs take account of predicted reductions in pupils' numbers in both primary and secondary phases to ensure the best outcomes for children whilst ensuring schools are financially sustainable.

Based on predicted data, it is anticipated that Newham's roll numbers would fall by 5% for the primary sector compared to the inner London average of 4.4%. The secondary sector would fall by 4% in Newham compared by the inner London average of 4.3%. Thus far Newham's modelling predications have been quite accurate.

A key consideration is to not lose the investment that the LA has made to date in the school estate, not least as pupil numbers could rise in the longer term. Smaller schools may face the greatest challenges in maintaining financial viability. These schools can adapt by sharing services to lower overall cost, but this would be a solution in every case.

Forum members asked about the LA's commitment to support job losses and the impact on the community if schools close. PG confirmed that there is no intention to close schools except as a very last resort. The council is seeking a common approach in finding solutions that minimise the wider impact for all concerned.

AE then presented the forecast and explained the methodology used to gain statistics used for the forecasting. Trends show further impact on a declining roll for the primary sector, particularly Catholic schools, which is a trend being experienced across London.

There was a discussion about permanent PAN reductions vs capping year groups and the wider impact for Newham's school population. It was suggested it is better to reduce PANs and keep a sustainable known budget until such a time that numbers increase again. Informal caps (not recognised by DfE) do not protect schools from appeal panel decisions which could result in schools having to open extra classes with additional staffing costs.

It was highlighted that new schools funded by housing developers can be problematic as there may not be a clear date when they will open and have rents so high it deters families with children moving into the area. These developments, even with 'affordable units' are sometimes not occupied and therefore put the sustainability of local schools at risk.

For secondary schools the forecast is for falling rolls but at a slower rate. The LA has a projected surplus of secondary school places this year taking into account temporary capping requests and over-allocation by some admissions authorities.

PG indicated that schools and trusts will need to collectively agree with the council what happens next as the council is not prescribing how the recommended reduction in school capacity is delivered. Schools and trusts will be invited to send their expression of interest for permanently reducing their PANs to PG. The council will then look at the overall position for the affected schools/areas.

Some Forum members questioned the equitability of the PAN reduction process. They also needed data to see growth plans for their area and the process/reassurances for un-mothballing schools before making a decision. PG responded that any process to increase PAN if pupil numbers increase in the long term would be transparent.

Some Forum members argued that the LA must be more on the front foot rather than waiting for schools to volunteer in this situation. There needs to be a specific proposal as over-subscribed schools are in an advantageous position of having a full complement of pupils and do not have to rely on admitting In-Year applicants. Schools feel that the decline is due to low numbers rather than poor school performance and therefore those schools with spaces should not be penalised.

Some Forum members felt that parental preference expressed should be considered in the decision making as the falling demand is not equal across the borough. Expansion in some schools have not caused others to decline according to preferences expressed over the last six years. Where possible, we should also try to keep up preference satisfaction rate as many families do not want their children to travel too far outside their local area.

PG concluded by confirming that the LA will aim to make provisional decisions with schools and trusts on PAN reductions by the end of the summer term. The LA will work with each school's board/trust and provide support and advice throughout the process. The statutory process for PAN reduction will begin in October 2024.

## **Agenda Item 6. Standing items**

### **Agenda Item 6.1 New academy conversions and proposed new free schools**

- St Michael's Catholic Primary School – To be converted by 1 May 2024 (delay with land).
- Plaistow Primary School – School at consultation stage

### **Agenda Item 6.2 Proposed consultation for change of admission arrangements for September 2026 entry**

TJ confirmed that any substantive changes to London Borough of Newham's school admissions arrangements for September 2026 must be submitted to the LA by the last school day of the summer term for review by the Forum in the autumn term. All new Published Admission Numbers (PAN) resulting from agenda item 5 will be included in these new arrangements as a substantive change but these will not need to be reported as the local authority is managing the process in partnership with schools.

Own Admission Authority schools who are not adopting the local authority's arrangements for September 2026 entry should notify PG and TJ if they intend to consult in the autumn term.

## **Agenda Item 7. New Department for Education guidance and reminders**

TJ reminded schools of recent guidance published by the DfE:

- [Working together to improve school attendance](#)
- [National framework for Penalty Notices](#)
- [Pupil Registration Regulations 2024](#)
- [Attendance data sharing 2024](#)
- [Travel to school for children of compulsory school age January 2024](#)

PG confirmed that the LA is providing training and support in these areas and advised that schools must plan for these changes.

## **Agenda Item 8. Any other business**

None

## **Agenda Item 9. Review and agree action points**

### **Action Points**

#### **1. Out of year group process flow proposals**

Proposed process for managing out of year group to be discussed at a future Forum meeting. This is a substantive item with a widening scope and higher demand so will be discussed as a main agenda item in the autumn 2024 meeting.

#### **2. PAN reduction process**

Schools and trusts will be invited to send EOIs for permanent PAN reductions in May so that provisional decisions can be made by the end of the summer term and statutory consultation can begin in October 2024.

## **Agenda Item 10. Date of meeting for the 2023/2024 school year and meeting close**

In person meeting was agreed to take place at Cumberland Secondary School on 10 June 2024, 3:30pm to 5:30pm. If possible, members would also like the option of joining remotely. **UPDATE:** It has not been possible to arrange an in person meeting for 10 June, we will arrange an in person meeting for the autumn term meeting.