

Overview & Scrutiny

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: Monday, 2 November 2020

Title of report: Report from the Independent Chair of the Hackney Schools Group Board

Report author: Eleanor Schooling CBE, Chair of the HSGB

Authorised by: Annie Gammon, Director of Education

This report provides the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission with an update on the progress made by the Hackney Schools Group Board since its launch on 13 November 2019.

This report includes an outline of the three key priorities that the HSG Board has agreed will be the focus of their work:

- (i) Belonging for all,
- (ii) Leading the Curriculum in Hackney,
- (iii) Reading for all.

These priorities will be pursued through the HSG Board Panels, the details of which are outlined below (please see section 3).

1. Background

- 1.1 The Hackney Schools Group Board was established by Hackney's Cabinet in April 2019 as an independent advisory board to champion educational excellence in the local school system, promote improvement and high standards, and underpin inclusion and wellbeing for all young people.
- 1.2 The Hackney Schools Group (HSG) Board has been developed to respond to the changing educational landscape in England, and ensure stability within the local school system. It has been shaped by the Council's Schools for Everyone consultation. Current Government policy continues to support schools to convert to academy status, while the local authority (LA) role in education continues to be circumscribed and downplayed. In local authorities where this has happened it has led to fragmentation and loss of direction and oversight in the school system.
- 1.3 More than 2,500 people responded to the Schools for Everyone consultation. The responses demonstrated that Hackney residents care about education. Some of the key findings showed that, on the whole, respondents recognised education in Hackney has improved; they opposed to academic selection and forced academisation; they believed that the Council should be involved in shaping the local education system, including overseeing the school admissions process - ensuring that it's fair and supporting our schools to be inclusive.
- 1.4 The HSG Board acts in an advisory role, championing educational excellence in the local school system, promoting improvement and high standards, the mental health and well-being of children and young people, and underpinning fair access and inclusion for all children and young people. The HSG Board has been designed not only to guard against the fragmentation of the local schools' system, but also ensure local democratic accountability. Our schools will continue to serve their local communities.
- 1.5 The HSG Board gives schools a clear remit to be system leaders, working firmly in partnership with Hackney Council. To strengthen and improve the schools' system, our schools will be able to collectively share in the leadership and oversight of a collaborative school system. Schools will play a role in setting the direction for school improvement and performance in Hackney, taking collective responsibility for collaboration and sharing of policy, as well as contributing to capacity building through the development of new education strategies and pedagogic practice.
- 1.6 The HSG Board is the practical realisation of the extensive research into what makes good schools systems better. Hackney can retain educational expertise and build professional capacity in the local system. Through the HSG Board school improvement expertise can be mobilised in our schools, promoting research-based innovation and the sharing of excellent practice across the local system.

2. HSG Board Membership

Since the Board was established, the progress made by the HSG Board has been swift and purposeful.

Board members met on Friday 11 October 2019 for a facilitated strategic planning workshop. At this meeting it was agreed that the effectiveness of the HSG Board would be underpinned by sound governance and a clear code of conduct to promote a collective sense of decision-making and collegial relationships.

2.1. Appointment of HSG Board Members

The HSG Board's membership has been appointed to bring a range of skills and experience to the role. Members are drawn from a range of professional backgrounds, to contribute their

time, knowledge and authority to provide the required leadership and challenge to improve the education system to one that is truly world class.

2.2. Appointment of the HSG Board Chair

On 16 September 2019, the Hackney Cabinet appointed Eleanor Schooling CBE as Chair of the Hackney Schools Group Board, for a term of three-years beginning on 1 October 2019.

2.3. Appointment of HSG Board members

On 16 October 2019, the Hackney Cabinet appointed the following people to serve as members of the HSG Board for a term of three years, commencing on 13 November 2019.

Elected member	Position
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble	Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care
Cllr Caroline Woodley	Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years and Play
Headteachers	School
Ben Hasan	Headteacher of Wentworth Nursery School
Louise Nichols	Executive Headteacher of the Kingsmead/Mandeville/Gayhurst Federation
Justine McDonald	Headteacher of Our Lady's Convent High School
Chairs of Governors	School
Kristofer McGhee	Princess May
Marisa Childs	Lauriston/Daubeny/Sebright and a parent of an SEND child.
Independent Board members	Position
Jermain Jackman	Chair of Young Futures Commission
Andrea Powell	Ernst & Young, a local parent and has worked on gender and routes into work.
Debra Robinson	Assistant Headteacher of Mossbourne, also involved in the Young Black Men project.
Executive Directors	Position
Anne Canning	Group Director for Children, Adults & Community Health
Annie Gammon	Director of Education, Hackney Education

2.4. A further Independent Board member, Dr Tracey Allen, was appointed on 16 March 2020 by the Chair and members of the HSG Board. Dr Allen has extensive knowledge of educational research and was appointed to the board to provide expertise in this area.

2.5. Responsibilities of HSG Board members

Appointed members of the Board will act in the best interests of the Hackney Schools Group Board as a whole. The members of the Board of the HSG will have key responsibilities in the following areas:

- (i) Strategic leadership - Contributing to the setting of a clear strategic approach for the Hackney Schools Group Board,
- (ii) Overseeing System Performance and Development - Supporting and guiding the Board in the assessment of performance and advising on development of the Hackney local schools' system, and
- (iii) Advocating on Behalf of the Hackney Schools Group Board - Taking a lead role in championing excellence in the local school system, promoting improvement and high standards, and ensuring fair access for all young people.

3. HSG Board Panels

At their inaugural meeting, the HSG Board established three panels (sub groups of the Board). These will focus on the Board's priorities and will be asked to carry out specific pieces of work. The HSG Board will be able to establish a further Board Panel, if this is required.

The HSG Board panels have been designed to draw on the expertise and experience of Board members, and others, to contribute innovation, challenge and quality assurance of the Hackney schools system; offering creative, practical solutions to tackle the challenges our schools system faces.

Membership of the panels consists of two board members (based on their area of expertise) co-opted members and senior staff from Hackney schools and other relevant bodies (such as Children's social care, NHS etc. as appropriate). The panels:

- Provide informed, authoritative voices in policy debates;
- Identify, articulate, and evaluate issues, and contribute to the development of proposals to address these;
- Contribute informed insights into emerging challenges, interpreting issues and policies and their relevance to Hackney;
- Provide a constructive forum for the exchange of ideas and information, drawing on the expertise of key stakeholders in the local system.

3.1. Belonging for all

One of the Hackney Schools Board's key priorities is to promote belonging within the local education system, to ensure every child feels respected, accepted and supported by their teachers and peers.

The Enhancing Belonging for all Board Panel will work to prioritise belonging within Hackney's family of schools, colleges and settings to ensure:

- (i) Support for children's emotional and social development,
- (ii) Enhance children's motivation and achievement throughout their years of education.

The Panel has begun working with Hackney Education and schools directly to inspire and promote a greater sense of belonging so that all children have that sense of being somewhere where they feel confident that they will fit in, be welcomed and be safe in their identity. The Panel carried out two very important pieces of work in the last academic year, the findings of which have been included in the below publications;

1. [Leading in the New Era](#)
2. [Listening to Parents Talking about Race](#)

3.1.1 Leading in the New Era - This project was led by Professor Riley and initiated at the earlier stages of lockdown due to the COVID-19 situation. Professor Riley organised sessions with

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headteachers of 6 schools in Hackney to explore aspects of their leadership approach, their responses to lockdown and reflecting on the implications for the future of school leadership. The sessions provided a space for Headteachers to openly discuss the challenges faced in these unprecedented times.

3.1.2 Listening to Parents Talking about Race - The focus on equalities has heightened this year and the Co-Chairs of the Panel were keen to utilise this opportunity to support schools in creating a fairer, equal environment where children can feel like they belong. In July 2020, the Co-Chairs of the Panel along with the Chair of the HSGB carried out a number of parental engagement sessions with 6 volunteer schools in Hackney on the topic of race and racism. The sessions were designed as an initial conversation to help school leaders hear from their parents and carers on the issue of belonging as well as provide some specific areas schools can focus on continuing this work from the next term.

The sessions were a great success in supporting constructive engagement between schools and their parents and supporting schools to hear directly from parents and carers about their experience of belonging and actions that can be taken as a result.

The Belonging Panel will be conducting further parental engagement sessions with Hackney schools in November 2020 and are currently in the planning stages of this work.

3.2. Leading the Curriculum in Hackney

The curriculum lies at the heart of education. It determines what learners will know and be able to do during and after their education. Leadership of the curriculum, including using and carrying out research about the design of an effective curriculum for each school, is a key priority for the Board.

The Leading the Curriculum in Hackney Panel will:

- (i) Lead a discussion across the local education system on what Hackney's children and young people want and need from the curriculum, including ideas of cultural capital
- (ii) Use and disseminate relevant research into curriculum
- (iii) Broker links with other research hubs and institutions with the aim of extending innovation and best practice re curriculum in all Hackney schools.

The aim of this work will be to:

- (i) Produces outputs available to all Hackney educational settings about a suitable curriculum for Hackney children
- (ii) Informs training and development of leaders of the curriculum for all phases and specialisms
- (iii) Articulates excellent practice in developing cultural capital for Hackney children
- (iv) Is relevant to the different priorities of all schools and their outcomes.

3.3. Reading for all

Reading is an essential element at all stages of education. If a child cannot read they will not be able to access the curriculum and be disadvantaged for life. A key priority for the Board is to inspire reading for all and to support schools, colleges and settings endeavour to develop students' reading and the ability to access knowledge. Giving students the skills to engage with, understand and appreciate the world around them will be central to the Reading for all Panel's work.

Reading is an essential component of all stages of education. The vocabulary children need to learn successfully across the curriculum is not always in everyday speech, and as much as 90% of it is only found through reading. A research based approach to the development of a broad range of reading skills can create expert readers able to read actively and learn across a wide range of subjects.

The HSG Board and Panel will oversee the development of initiatives to promote reading in schools, settings, in the home and in local facilities such as libraries to:

- Support a reading culture to ensure all children become and remain confident, enthusiastic and proficient readers,
- Embed reading across all relevant curriculum subjects to develop key skills promote an understanding of using language that is appropriate for particular situations,
- Promote a coherent system-wide strategy for promoting lifetime reading, and
- Develop best practice, based on the understanding that being able to read confidently and well is a key life skill for children, whatever their background.

The Panel will work with Hackney Education to ensure an informed, research-based approach that builds on existing strategies and good practice in Hackney education. The campaign will also draw upon the expertise and resources from the Council and partner agencies.

The three Panels establish an approach whereby the HSG Board can contribute most effectively to ensuring that every pupil in Hackney feels valued and can fulfil their full potential. There is an expectation that the theme of the workforce and CPD will be cross cutting in the three main priorities.

Hackney has a strong family of schools that frequently work collaboratively. The focus of the priorities is to further strengthen partnership working on the three themes. Schools are invited to shape the work on the three themes by participating in the Panels that will lead the priorities. This enables schools to have a deeper involvement in the leadership of the system.