



London Borough of Hackney
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2018/19
Date of Meeting Monday 31 October 2022

Minutes of the proceedings of the
Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street,
London E8 1EA

Chair	Councillor Sophie Conway
Councillors in Attendance	Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Caroline Selman, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge and Cllr Claudia Turbet-Delof
Virtual	Cllr Anya Sizer, Cllr Lynne Troughton, Salmah Kansara Steven Olalere
Co-optees	Richard Brown, Andy English and Jo Macleod
Apologies:	Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott; Cllr Midnight Ross.
In Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Children’s Social Care.- Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play.- Jacquie Burke, Group Director, Children and Education.- Paul Senior, Interim Director of Education- Chris Roberts, Head of Wellbeing and Education Safeguarding.- Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Well-being.- Jenna Clark, Executive Headteacher, Gainsborough Primary School.- Louise Nichols, Executive Headteacher at Gayhurst, Kingsmead and Mandeville Primary Schools.
Live-link recording:	https://youtu.be/aRMuvjSnDJw
Members of the Public:	2 members of the press were present.
Officer Contact:	Martin Bradford  020 8356 3315  martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Commission:

- Cllr Lee Laudat Scott;
- Cllr Midnight Ross.

1.2 The following members connected virtually:

- Cllr Anya Sizer;
- Cllr Lynne Troughton (also joining the meeting late);
- Salmah Kansara;
- Steven Olalere.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 The outcome of the focused visit of Children's Social Care by Ofsted which took place in September was published on the 26th October 2022. Unfortunately, this was too late for inclusion within this agenda. The Commission therefore asked the Group Director for Children and Education for a brief verbal update to highlight the key outcomes from the Ofsted assessment and the service response. It was agreed that this would be taken after item 4 (and recorded under any other business item 8).

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 The following declarations were received by members of the Commission:

- Jo McLeod was a Governor at a primary school in Hackney and a parent of a child with SEND;
- Cllr Anya Sizer was a parent of a child with SEND.

4 Childhood Food Poverty: Free School Meals Eligibility and Uptake (19.05)

4.1 From local data it was understood that almost one-half of local children are living in poverty after housing costs have been taken into account. Also taking the current cost of living crisis into consideration, it is clear that poverty and food insecurity will have a significant impact on local children and families and for the local services that support them, including local schools and education settings.

4.2 The aim of this item was to help understand the nature of the childhood food hunger and the role play by schools in response. It was hoped that this scrutiny would help to identify any additional support which could be provided to schools to support them in this work. In particular, the Commission focused on:

- Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement and uptake;
- The reach and focus of School Breakfast Clubs;
- How schools are connected to wider food poverty programmes and networks.

4.3 To further inform members' understanding of this policy area and support the scrutiny process, members of the Commission visited a number of local primary and secondary schools and food projects ahead of this meeting. These visits were helpful and informative and the Commission thanked all those schools and food projects that accommodated members.

Hackney Education

4.4 The Cabinet member and the Director of Education thanked the Commission for supporting this discussion and the opportunity to engage collectively with other

stakeholders across the local education system on the issue of childhood food poverty. It was noted that a task force had recently been commissioned by the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care which would support a childhood food poverty summit. The task force would:

- Review what resources were available to support this policy area;
- Assess what is working locally and how to best share good practice;
- Identify what can be learnt from neighbouring education systems in how they address childhood food poverty.

4.5 The Director of Education would be inviting local school leaders and, health and voluntary sector organisations to participate in the childhood food poverty task force and would report its work to the summit in January 2023. The aim of this work would be to improve support for children not just in local schools, but across all early years and post 16 settings. The summit will produce a set of recommendations to address childhood food poverty in Hackney.

4.6 The submitted paper set out the context for Free School Meal (FSM) provision in Hackney as well as other ways in which schools and other educational settings were addressing childhood food poverty locally (e.g. Breakfast Clubs and wider engagement with food poverty networks). The challenge now was to engage local school leaders to understand how the education system as a whole can work better to improve support to children and families at this really challenging time.

Gainsborough - Executive Head

4.7 Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) was introduced at this school as a response to falling school rolls. The introduction of UFSM was part of an overall plan to develop a new way forward for the school which responded to high levels of need among its pupils (e.g. high levels of children with SEND, on a child protection plan or who were looked after by the local authority). It was also noted that with high local levels of disadvantage, families often struggled to fund school meals and other school activities and sometimes got into arrears. This often created negative relationships between parents and teachers and the wider school. The school was also aware that there was a significant cohort of families who were just over the eligibility threshold who did not qualify for FSM but who were also struggling to fund meals for their children.

4.8 In response to the above conditions the school chose to set up two schemes:

- Universal Free School meals for all children (which equated to a further 120 meals per day);
- Free 30 hour wraparound support in the nursery (targeted at those children and families most in need)

4.9 The school indicated that the above developments had a positive impact on pupils and the wider community in respect that these:

- Offered a preventative approach to help children that might need help;
- Helped children to access lessons ready to develop and learn;
- Created more positive interactions between parents and teachers and other school staff which contributed to better relations;
- Acknowledged the wider concerns of the school community.

4.10 To support the introduction of UFSM the school also took the following steps:

- School staff were diverted from chasing school meal debts to increasing take up of FSM;

- Increased costs for staff school meals to help offset costs of introduction of UFSM.
- Free Breakfast Club offer to all children through Magic Breakfast;
- Connections to a local charity also provides free monthly meal drops for families which can be picked up from the school.

Monday 31 October 2022

4.11 The annual cost of introducing UFSM across the whole school was much less than expected with totalling approximately £20k. It was expected that this cost would reduce in the future as the school had recently won a bid to develop a circular food programme. This would allow the school to grow fruit and vegetables on site which would contribute to reduced running costs for school meals services.

Gayhurst, Kingsmead and Mandeville - Executive Head

4.12 UFSM was introduced at one of the schools for many of the reasons set out in 4.4-4.11. Whilst around 60% of children were entitled to FSM, the schools were acutely aware of the needs of those families who were just above the threshold and did not qualify therefore the introduction of UFSM would help support them.

4.13 Schools were also aware that one of the counter arguments for the introduction of UFSM was that this would be providing a free service to some families that could afford them. In one of the schools, parents of children in years 1 and 2 (where FSM was universally available) could voluntarily contribute to the cost of free school meals if they could afford it, and this funding helped to offset FSM costs or was used for other support activities children (e.g. after school clubs and breakfast club).

4.14 All three schools offered a breakfast club, but in only one was this a totally free service. Take up of the breakfast club where this was freely provided was high with about 80-90 students per day (which is a considerable proportion of pupils in a single form entry school). Breakfast clubs are supported by Magic Breakfast, but there is now an annual fee for this service and was therefore much harder to provide sustainably given additional staffing and other costs. All three schools provide after school clubs on 2 days per week for children who qualify for FSM. This combined 'wraparound' offer was common amongst many local primary schools.

4.15 It was clear that a number of local schools were providing UFSM where there was already a high levels of FSM entitlement. Once FSM entitlement was taken into account alongside universal school meal provision (year 1 and year 2) the financial gap to reach school wide coverage of FSM was not that great.

4.16 Given the hardships that many local families are facing, FSM provision might also be important to families' decisions over which schools their children attended. In this context, FSM provision could be a contributory factor to falling school rolls in Hackney, especially where these situated adjacent to borough boundaries with neighbouring boroughs where FSM is universal to all children (e.g. Islington and Tower Hamlets).

4.17 The schools also run a weekly food drop with Felix Project (a charity which distributes surplus food to primary schools), holiday projects and other programmes supporting vulnerable children and their families. To avoid stigmatisation, food distributed in the school is free to all parents regardless of whether their child qualifies for FSM or not. This was a lesson learnt from the pandemic, when the system for food distribution was perceived to be divisive.

4.18 It was emphasised that schools were already seeing many families experiencing extreme hardship, and that a collective and an urgent local response was required to support children and families.

Our Lady's - Head Teacher

4.19 The proposal of the Deputy Mayor to set up a task force to consider childhood food poverty was welcomed as this was a shared challenge amongst many stakeholders.

4.20 Whilst providing FSM to all pupils was desirable, it was not possible within current financial constraints of the school. The school actively encouraged parents to apply for FSM using the local authority portal as well as the paper version. Costs of school

dinners at the school were £2.10 per day, which was probably the lowest daily charge made by schools.

4.21 A breakfast Club was provided free of charge to pupils every morning at which between 60-80 attended daily (about 10% of all pupils). The club was initially funded by a successful bid for £11k from a law firm and £1k donation from Kelloggs, but as this funding was not recurring, costs are now absorbed within the general school budget. The school is part of the national Breakfast Club Programme operated by Family Action and Magic Breakfast. Study spaces are also provided at breakfast time to allow children to complete homework or other studies.

4.22 Food is also provided at an After School Club alongside additional study space and time for children. All pre and post school clubs are challenged by inflationary costs for foodstuffs and wages of support staff, and additional financial backing is constantly being sought to ensure programmes are sustainable. A charity provides food and hygiene packs for about 40-60 children in need every term.

4.23 In terms of additional support, additional resources would always be welcome. A commitment from the local authority that the Holiday and Activities Funding (HAF) would continue would also be welcome to ensure that children in need are fed during school holidays. The Household Support Fund also provided food vouchers for families during the holidays and again, early clarification that this was going to be continued would be welcomed by schools.

4.24 Schools also questioned whether the local authority could play a role in bulk buying of foodstuffs which would deliver real cost efficiencies for participating schools. A local purchasing platform could help schools to access foodstuffs for school kitchens and other food provision areas.

Urswick - Head teacher

4.25 A UFSM system has been in operation for 8 years in the school, and is currently the only secondary school locally and nationally to do so. The school has the highest rate of children entitled to FSM at around 70%, therefore the cost of extending free meal provision to the remaining 30% of students is marginal (but not insignificant). The additional costs are covered by additional income from letting of school buildings and car parking charges.

4.26 Aside from reducing the impact of economic inequality, it was noted that there are many benefits to UFSM provision in the school as it reduced stigma felt by children and also reduced the administrative time and resources needed to support paid for school meals systems (collecting money, banking cash, chasing debts). Staff are also entitled to a free lunch if they commit to eating with the children. It was acknowledged that compromises had to be made within the system, in that menus could not be extensive if to retain sustainable unit costs.

4.27 UFSM was also extended to V11th form students and it was suggested that this may be a factor in children from disadvantaged backgrounds from staying on in education rather than entering the workplace (especially since the loss of the Educational Maintenance Allowance).

4.28 Schools, particularly in the secondary sector, might need additional help to enable them to transition to UFSM:

- Increased kitchen capacity;
- Offset and reduce food costs by bulk buying and similar collaborative solutions
- To support those families just above the threshold of FSM entitlement.

4.29 It was also emphasised that early notification of HAF was important so that schools could plan and prioritise holiday activities and food provision. Schools were

only notified 2 weeks in advance of half-term that vouchers would be provided so early notice is appreciated.

Questions from the Commission

4.30 [To Gainsborough] It was noted that FSM entitlement increased after the provision of UFSM. What were the reasons behind this?

The resource which was used to administer the school meals systems was transferred to target families who might be eligible for FSM and therefore increase uptake. This provided time to meet families and help them complete the necessary application forms. This resulted in about a 10% increase in eligibility and uptake and this support had now been fully integrated into the school administrative system (e.g. support at school entry).

4.31 Could Hackney Education confirm the HAF and holiday food vouchers would be provided for the Christmas holiday period for in need children and families?

Hackney Education confirmed that HAF was a central government funded initiative and that assurance had been given that this would continue for Christmas and Easter holidays, though no decision had been reached for the summer holidays for 2023. HE was aware of the success of the HAF and was keen for this to continue.

4.32 There is explicit guidance on the quality and nutritional standards for school meals and School Governors are responsible for these being maintained in their respective schools. How do schools assess the quality of meals that they provide that are balanced and nutritious? Is this independently inspected? Is there any development work undertaken with School Governors to support this food standards role? What role does the Local Authority play in any inspections and maintenance of these standards? Is there further scope for input from the local Public Health department in supporting schools to develop healthy and nutritious meals?

- This was an important area though Hackney Education did not have the information to hand to answer this fully, and suggested that this be provided in writing after the meeting. It was noted that the task group would probably consider what possible role the local authority might have in facilitating the purchase power of schools and other collaborative initiatives.

- A primary head noted that there was a local charity called Chefs in Schools which aims to improve and develop school meal provision in a cost effective and sustainable way. The charity is based in Hackney and encourages schools to bring their catering in-house as it is more effective to up-skill kitchen staff and can be used for other school wide educational activities (e.g. food tech). The model of provision varies widely across schools with some schools preferring to contract out, and prices vary from £1.65 to £3.00 per unit. Chefs in School also supports access to food apps which enable school catering teams to source in season fruit and vegetables in a more cost effective way. Chefs in Schools is a not for profit organisation and all apps are free for schools to use. The charity also offers the opportunity to collaborate with other schools. It was noted that one of the schools in the Kings Park ward shared its kitchen facilities with other schools and community groups to help distribute cooked food to those that might need it. There is much good practice taking place in relation to food distribution, though it might benefit from greater coordination. Local Authorities do not get involved in assessing the quality of food provided to children as this is a school responsibility, as too is the decision as to whether school meals are provided in-house or contracted out.

- Another primary head noted that by using Chefs in Schools, the nutritional standards of all meals was checked as part of their package of support. The real expertise of Chefs in School was bringing the staff and the community into the kitchen which made a huge difference to what was included on the menu and what children ate and so that staff understood what was important for children to eat and enabled them to make healthier choices. Education and Health Partnership charity (which is run by a former HE employee) assesses nutritional standards and food and hygiene practices in the kitchen and all schools would have access to this service. As a federation of 8 schools, the

Monday 31 October 2022

school kitchens would work collaboratively over the holiday period to ensure that hot meals were provided across the family of schools.

- Schools present noted that quality and standards was a Governing Body responsibility. Being responsible for re-commissioning contracts was also a tool for improving standards of delivery for school meals. Catering companies working for schools could also bulk buy to achieve cost savings for schools. The local authority does have a role in inspecting and rating all food premises.

- HE emphasised that it would be important to develop a collegiate approach in response to the challenges in this policy area, to share good practice, learn what is working locally and extend and support that where possible. It was noted that the Local Authority does not have any jurisdiction in respect of nutritional standards in schools and that this is the responsibility of individual schools.

Action: Hackney Education to provide further information on school food standards and how food quality and nutrition is monitored and assessed locally.

4.33 How do local schools ensure that models of UFSM are sustainable?

A primary head reported that in many instances, schools needed to offset the shortfall in funding for UFSM provision by other sources of income or through charitable donations. In many instances these were 'one-off' funding allocation and new funders might have to be sought elsewhere if other in school budgets cannot be used to cross-subsidise provision. Whilst the local authority cannot provide additional funding for operational costs of UFSM, it was suggested that it might consider be able to assist through capital development projects for maintained schools such as those needed for school kitchen refurbishment.

4.34 Although the focus of UFSM provision has been on primary school provision, given that the eligibility for FSM among Hackney secondary schools is higher, could there not also be a case for extending UFSM to secondary pupils also?

- This will be something that the task group will be assessing to help understand why rates of FSM eligibility are higher in secondary schools than primary schools.

4.35 Given that head teachers noted the urgency of this issue, what is the timeline for the proposed task force and summit on childhood food poverty?

- Invitations for a focus group will be sent out the week commencing 31st October 2022 to local system leaders, partners, voluntary sector groups and chefs. This will create the groundwork and priorities for a summit which will meet which will convene before Christmas. Recommendations will be developed for the Deputy Mayor for early in the New Year.

4.36 Can further information be provided about neighbouring boroughs which provide UFSM to primary age children? How is this funded?

- As part of the task force and summit, officers will consider other models of provision on other local authorities including neighbouring boroughs like Islington. The local authority also had to be mindful of any unintended consequences of UFSM such as any possible impact on Pupil Premium eligibility and uptake and would need to fully assess that in relation to development proposed for Hackney.

4.37 In relation to the Council's target for net zero, have there been any moves towards introducing a plant based diet as part of the school meals service?

- Chefs in Schools operate a policy of 2 no-meat days and 3 meat days (2 meat 1 fish) per week, which all complies with national school meal standards. Non-meat days were introduced in 2014, and whilst there were some initial concerns raised by parents, vegetarian days are very well integrated into the school menu and there are no problems.

Monday 31 October 2022

- As raised earlier, a primary school had won a bid for a circular food economy which would enable the schools to become almost self-sufficient in terms of fruit and vegetable provision within the menu, and would include no meat days also.
- HE noted that a school survey undertaken in Hackney in 2021 noted that 64% of schools had their own in-house catering and 37% had two meat free days per week and 23% had 1 meat free day.

4.38 Can further information be provided on what the Catering Framework is? Why do we think that primary schools did not sign up to the Hackney Education Catering Framework?

- A primary school noted that some schools may be reluctant to go through a catering framework as this may result in additional costs due to support the profit margins required by caterers. External contracting meant that there was less flexibility in managing catering staff and the opportunity for wider food education and support across the school. There were also concerns that less scrupulous caterers might take the opportunity to offload lower quality foodstuffs through school meals services.
- A secondary school noted that school meal provision was currently provided in-house, and although an external catering company had been approached, it was felt that the contract would not be sufficiently profitable and therefore not viable.
- A secondary school noted that they pay a management fee to their catering company in addition to the cost of the food and for catering staff. This supports training, menu development and the provision of cover for staff sickness.
- HE reported that the number of schools which operate their own meals service and those that contract out would be considered by the task group, if this is seen to be related to a wider approach to addressing childhood food poverty. It was emphasised that school governing bodies are responsible for whether school meals are provided in-house or contracted out.

4.39 Notwithstanding local finance in schools, can the local authority be any more ambitious in relation to aims for school meal provision, particularly in relation to quality and standards of meals and what can be done to support schools? It would be helpful if the task group could also look at the sustainability of school relationships with voluntary partners and local sourcing of foods.

- HE indicated that local community and voluntary sector groups which have an interest in school meal provision would be invited to participate in the summit.

4.40 From the data in the report (at Table 1 page 18/19) it was clear that FSM entitlement among children in alternative provision is high. Is Council assured that children in alternative provision who are eligible for FSM are receiving their entitlement every day? What sort of arrangements are in place? Is there any additional support provided to alternative providers to provide FSM given that AP sites are often small-scale and may not have economies of scale for food provision.

- Any child on site at the Pupil Referral Unit is entitled to a free school meal and the same applies to any commissioned alternative provision (this forms part of a service level agreement with alternative provision providers). Alternative providers are very different, therefore some will provide on-site and others will contract out to a local food provider. Schools also commission alternative providers directly, and will commission separate lunch arrangements.

4.41 The Commission felt that it would be really helpful if the task force could consider the following issues:

- The role that local authorities can play in relation to food quality and standards when they supported schools to provide meals universally (e.g. Islington)
- The approach taken to school meal debts accrued by parents;
- The uptake of FSM within the Orthodox Jewish Community at maintained schools.

4.42 The National Breakfast Club provides free breakfast foods and grants to set up school clubs. Data from the National Breakfast Club Programme suggests that whilst many Hackney schools were eligible to receive free support, only 9 local schools have actually signed up. Do we have an understanding of why this might be the case? Are there structural issues inhibiting sign-up? Is there anything that Hackney Education can do to facilitate sign-up?

- A local school noted that many local schools were signed up to Magic Breakfast, a charity that supports schools to provide breakfast clubs. In many cases this association was developed before the establishment of the National Breakfast Club programme and would not have been able to apply under the guidance (i.e. the programme predominantly supports new clubs).

4.43 What connections do schools have with local food projects and programmes? Is there anything we can do to support schools to develop these connections to better be able to support children and families?

- School connections to local food projects and programmes varied. The Felix Project works closely with a number of local schools supplying foodstuffs for use or to distribute on to parents. With their understanding of children and families in need, it was suggested that schools were ideal hubs to help distribute food and, as was underlined in the pandemic, could reach and deliver food to a wider range of residents beyond those that had children attending the school.

It was noted that the Felix project was no longer taking any further referrals as it was operating at full capacity. Most local schools would also be subscribed to magic breakfast which would mean that you cannot subscribe to other charitable food organisations.

-Another school indicated that it would be helpful if there was a database of those organisations which supported local schools around addressing food poverty and wider poverty issues.

Chair Summary

4.44 It's apparent that further research is needed by Hackney Education and the Council in general to get a better understanding of how schools are addressing childhood hunger:

- Which schools are providing universal Free School Meals and how they are supporting such initiative
- The provision of breakfast clubs, which children they are targeted at and how many attend
- How schools connect to wider food programmes and networks.

4.45 The Commission welcomed the proposal to set up a task group to look at childhood food poverty to help establish what was currently being provided, share good practice and develop a borough wide approach. The Commission will draw up a number of recommendations which it hopes will positively contribute to the establishment of the task force and summit and efforts to address food insecurity in schools across Hackney.

5 School Moves (20.15)

5.1 Exclusions and all school moves is a standing item on the work programme of the Commission to review the range and number of pupil moves across schools in Hackney. This is to ensure that the Commission has oversight of school exclusions, in the wider context of all school moves. Therefore the Commission has annual updates on

- Permanent exclusions;
- Managed Moves;
- Children in Elective Home Education
- Children in Alternative Provision.

5.2 There were two slight amendments to this data for the Commission for this year:
-The Commission also requested additional demographic information in relation to SEND status for the all school moves data; and
-In light of rising rates of pupil absence and persistent absence the Commission also requested a brief update on local data - given their clear connection exclusions and other school moves.

Hackney Education

5.3 It was noted school exclusion was an important local issue and that the local education system was working to ensure that schools were inclusive. The vast majority of pupil movement related to those children entering the borough or leaving the borough, or those moving in between Hackney schools. There were over 1800 removals from school roll and 1400 added to school rolls during the period to June 2022. The report focused on the smaller sub-group of this cohort of children who may have additional needs or vulnerabilities, such as those who are permanently excluded, moving to Elective Home Education (EHE), who transfer schools via the Managed Moves process or receive their education in alternative provision.

5.4 The rates of persistent absence in schools across the country was now almost twice as high as they were before the pandemic. Whilst rates of absence in Hackney may not be as high as regional and national averages, it was acknowledged that local rates had nonetheless doubled. This was a concern as school absence can impact on attainment and the longer term outcomes for children.

Questions from the Commission

5.5 **Given the interrelationship between these different cohorts of school moves, does Hackney Education have sufficient capacity not only to review and analyse local school move data effectively but also ensure that officers work across services to effectively support pupils? What is the total number of officers which support these policy areas?**

- Whilst additional funding would always be welcome, Hackney Education was confident that officers were working collaboratively and effectively together to support pupils and partners in all school moves. Hackney Education has some statutory responsibilities to act in respect of some aspects of school moves, but schools also have the freedom to innovate and some would be directing their own resources to these issues. The data does provide the pretext for Hackney Education to challenge schools around attendance, exclusion or any other school moves.

- The data presented in the report covers a number of teams that all create and manage their own datasets rather than one overall service, which of course brings its own challenges. It was noted that whilst there have been new duties and expectations placed on local authorities in respect of education, there has not been any budget increase from the central government to support this. It was acknowledged that staffing resources were limited for some services (Elective Home Education - 1 WTE; Children Missing Education - 2WTE). Hackney does operate a traded service for local schools in respect of pupil attendance which is focused on the statutory obligations. It should be noted that there is no legal duty on schools to share data with Hackney Education, and primary settings were generally much better at this than secondary. Legislation was going through parliament at the moment which would extend data sharing requirements for schools.

- It was also noted that the cyber-attack had a profound impact on local data collection, the directorates were aware of the importance of shared data systems and the role this played in creating a unified approach to supporting local children and families. New contracts were up for retender in the near future and this would be an important consideration in this process. In reaction to fragmentation of teams, it was noted that a new Director of Business Intelligence and Strategy position had been developed which aims to bring greater synergies and more effective working relationships across children's services and education, it is hoped that this post will also be able to bring a more streamlined approach to data collection and analysis to support local services.

5.6 Have there been any suspected cases of 'off-rolling' among local schools in the past 12 months? Accepting that this a 'grey area' what intelligence and insight does Hackney Education have around possible cases and if there are aspects which need further interrogation or follow up?

- Whilst there were examples of when the relationship between school and families had broken down which has resulted in a child being removed from the school roll, it was difficult to determine whether these constituted 'off-rolling' as such cases can be difficult to prove. There can be disagreements between the school and parents as to whether it is in the best interest of the child to stay on in a particular school or whether it may be more beneficial to move to another school.
- Since the Commission's work on this in 2019/20, HE has been looking more closely at pupil roll movement at year 10 and year 11 and who have not gone on to take exams. HE has been focusing on those schools where pupil movement has exceeded 5% where the School Improvement Team provides external challenges as to why these figures may be high. Generally schools have a very clear presentation of why these children were removed from the school roll and have an understanding of where these children have gone to. Sometimes children are moved into Elective Home Education when this may not be the best option for the child, and HE then supports that child to be reintegrated back into mainstream education, most likely in another school. The challenge of off-rolling is that it is very difficult to nail down as this is always dependent on the relationship between the schools and the family which can be complex and where there are different expectations and understanding.
- Head teachers present noted that there is now a more rigorous Ofsted assessment of those year 10 pupils which do not make it to the end of year 11 (and examinations) and if off-rolling is detected, the school will be automatically placed in 'Requires Improvement' category.

5.7 Is the Council confident that it is matching the expectations and ambitions to reduce school exclusions with the additional resources and teacher training required? Does the Council currently work with The Difference, an exclusions charity, supporting teachers to reduce exclusions?

- The Council offers a comprehensive training programme to support Continuous Professional Development for teachers, which is designed in consultation with local schools' needs.
- Reducing school exclusions is a local priority and HE was confident that local school leaders understood the importance of inclusion. It was emphasised that supporting those children for whom mainstream school might not be the best place for them to receive their education was a community wide responsibility encompassing a wide range of local services (e.g. social care, community safety, health).
- On the recommendation of the CYP Scrutiny Commission, the Re-engagement Unit was expanded to include secondary schools. From September 2022, additional investment has been made in this team which now has a universal offer to schools to support those most vulnerable students at risk of exclusion. The Unit is made up of a staff from a wide range of disciplines including teaching, CAMHS and youth work and as such has a broad range of skills which can help schools and local school leaders to develop inclusive practice and also better support vulnerable children and their families to help maintain their places in mainstream education. The focus was on prevention and that there was an early help offer to reduce the need for more reactive interventions at a later stage.

5.8 Are all schools signed up to the Re-Engagement Unit?

Although this was a universal service, and with the exception of one or two local schools, the team was in every school having conversations with school leaders about children at risk of exclusion.

5.9 Is there any associated patterns between detentions and the impact that this has on mental wellbeing of pupils and permanent school exclusions? Is there any data on this issue?

- A headteacher reported since the pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils with mental health concerns, and that the school had to be creative in responding to and supporting these needs. The school had introduced more counselling support and now employs its own counsellor and also introduced a number of peer support groups for pupils. There is a real concern around thresholds to access CAMHS support, with the school being increasingly told that pupils do not meet the threshold and therefore required to develop their own pastoral care to support pupils but this requires additional training and support to our staff.

- In relation to exclusion, one school reported that it operated a restorative justice programme where instead of sanctioning children, children are given an opportunity to repair and re-engage, where children have an opportunity to sit down and explain everything. In some instances, the manifestation of poor behaviour is a result of other unmet pupil needs and the school was of the firm belief that every pupil should have a member of staff with whom they feel confident and comfortable talking about a wider range of issues and where issues of concern can be raised. The school takes advantage of the early help offered through Young Hackney, and tries to prevent exclusions by partnering with other schools where reciprocal arrangement can be made for pupil transfer to other schools out of the borough where a fresh start may be the best option for children.

- From the PRU perspective, it was noted that a number of schools still operate a points based behaviour system, in this context there is a significant number of exclusions which arise through 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. Many exclusions that happen at secondary level relate to carrying of weapons or the physical assault of another young person, most of these are outside the school away from the oversight of adults. In this context, headteachers often feel the need to exclude a pupil to ensure the safety of other pupils which may have been affected by this behaviour and to ensure that the school remains a safe space. More training around the impact of social media on young people, and the triggering effect that this has on pupil behaviour would be welcome.

5.10 What progress has been made on the Inclusion Charter which was being rolled out within local schools?

The Systems Leader for Diversity and Inclusion had recently led a two day CPD course for local schools on this issue and it was expected that those attending will return to their schools to update and up skill other members of staff. This is a broad focused piece of work which will encompass not only issues of race, but also SEND status. The Systems Leader was also an experienced teacher with a long history of teaching at a local school in Hackney and therefore understood the local landscape of needs.

5.11 What programme of support is available for children who are persistently or severely absent from school, in particular to the cohort of children who have SEND or mental health issues? How does our approach on this issue vary from other boroughs?

Many local authorities have reduced their education and welfare support when funding was reduced some years back, so most offer a core service with some element of additional support which is a traded service. New guidance on attendance will require additional involvement and this will be problematic for many authorities. Locally, the WAMHS provides access to mental health advice and support in education settings and very few authorities have comparable services. It was also noted that the local clinicians have also been working on providing guidance for schools around emotionally based school avoidance, which of course has important connections to SEND needs and potentially permanent exclusion. Whilst there was good work locally, it was acknowledged that more could be done.

5.12 Can officers outline the process through which challenge is provided to schools with higher rates of school moves. In previous years, it has been noted

Monday 31 October 2022

that the Director of Education has visited these schools with other officers, but these visits now have been replaced by School Improvement Partners?

The last couple of years these visits and challenge has been undertaken by the School Improvement Team under the oversight of the Director of Education. The main point of challenge is assessing whether the destination of all those children is a reasonable outcome for them and the headteachers have to account for these moves. It is clear that headteachers now see these moves as a safeguarding issue which is an important development.

5.13 There are 750 boys from the Orthodox Jewish Community which are known to be missing education and a further unknown. Will the new requirements for parents to register their children who are electively home educated increase oversight?

- It is not clear if the Schools Bill will actually progress through parliament, but if it does, it is likely to have a significant impact on the Charedi community. If it does progress, then the Council will also need to plan what impact this will have and make sure the necessary resources are in place. HE was having conversations with local education leaders around the potential impact of the Bill in preparation.

5.14 The Chair thanked officers for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.

6 Work Programme 2022/23 (21.00)

6.1 Members were given the updated work programme for the remainder of the year. It was noted that the SEND Strategy is due to come to scrutiny on 30/11/22 which will mainly be to note as the strategy will have been agreed. The SEND Action Plan will be taken in February 2023 where the Commission will have an oversight role in ensuring that partners will be held accountable for delivering the strategy.

6.2 It was noted that the Outcome of School Exclusions update report would come to the Commission in January 2023. This update would be followed up at a date determined by the Commission.

6.3 The Commission noted the work programme.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (21.20)

7.1 The minutes of the last meeting on 29th September were not ready for this meeting and would be presented at the next meeting.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 In September 2022, Ofsted visited Children and Families Service to assess front of house services (e.g. access points to children's social care and care thresholds). The Group Director summarised key issues arising from the Ofsted and outlined key actions the service is planning to take in response. If there are any substantive issues which warrant further questioning these can be scrutinised in greater detail at the next meeting (30/11/22) where this focus of the meeting is on Children's Social Care.

8.2 The Group Director noted the headline findings from the ofsted focused visit included:

There was a good front door service in Hackney which conducted appropriate assessments and applied appropriate thresholds;

Most children received proportionate responses and received the help that they needed; Senior leaders were providing strong leadership in developing and improving practice at a pace acceptable to staff;

Monday 31 October 2022

Children and families had committed and experienced staff who felt well supported; There was a strong commitment to youth services and the Young Hackney offer and had been key in addressing serious youth violence.

8.3 It was noted that a nationwide crisis in the recruitment and retention of social workers had also impacted on Hackney, as evidenced by some delays in assessments and a bulge in case loads. Both of these issues were identified as areas of improvement for the service. Also whilst there was strong management oversight of cases, the inspectors indicated that there was not sufficient reflective practice recorded in the casework. The key message from the visit however was that all social work assessments viewed by the inspectors were good.

8.4 In terms of follow up actions, the service was developing a new workforce strategy to ensure that the children and families service remained attractive to employees and that they were committed to working for Hackney. This could be brought to scrutiny if needed.

8.5 In light of the positive review by Ofsted inspectors, the Chair commended officers from across the service for their achievement and thanked them for their efforts to develop and maintain children's social care services which meet the needs of local children and families.

8.6 The date of the next meeting was 8th September 2022. There were no other items of business.