

Interview with the Executive Member for Children's Services and Education

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

October 11 2006

Written responses

2. Can you please tell us what the current status is with schools going in and coming out of special measures? Are we learning from the experiences and developing best practice?

The number of schools in Special Measures and Serious Weaknesses in the Autumn of 2002 was four schools in Special Measures and three schools deemed to have Serious Weaknesses. In Autumn 2006 we have two schools (one secondary, one primary) deemed to require Special Measures and no schools judged to need a Notice to Improve (formerly Serious Weaknesses). Both schools were judged to require Special Measures in the Autumn of 2005 and both have seen changes in leadership and have interim management teams from the Southwark School Leadership Team. The most recent HMI monitoring reports on the two schools in special measures have judged the quality of the LA support to these schools as good.

The LA now has in place a number of systems, structures and protocols which enable the early identification of concerns and the ability to ensure support is co-ordinated and cohesive. Examples include:

- Categorisation process enables the LA to more effectively deploy resources.
- Strategic Improvement Group which monitors the schools' work, and evaluates the effectiveness of the input from the LA against outcomes.
- The Management, Information, and Assessment team provides high quality data - fundamental to the LA's ability to challenge underperformance.
- Quality Assurance systems to ensure effective performance of all officers and consultants.
- Appointment of a Senior Adviser with responsibility for Schools Causing Concern, with an excellent record of supporting failing schools and strong relationship with HMI.
- Members of the Southwark School Leaders Team contribute significantly to stabilising and improving schools where headteachers have moved on.

It should be noted that the success of LA support into schools causing concern is very dependent upon the capacity of the school in terms of leadership and management, recruitment of high quality staff, the stability of the organisation at the time of inspection, the individual school's receptiveness to support and the degree to which LA support has had time to impact on outcomes.

12. What annual savings are likely to accrue to the council if and when all secondary schools in the borough become academies (as against the position if no schools were academies)? How does this compare with funding the council will lose because the schools are no longer part of the LEA?

Education funding comes to the LA in two components, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the Local Authority funding block. The DSG funds the individual delegated schools' budgets and also the resources for pupil referral units, inclusion and SEN services.

The total DSG is based on an amount per pupil for every child in the system, including early years. This can be averaged out at an amount per pupil (approx £5000). For every child in an academy the DfES deducts this average amount and from this funds the academies directly.

There is an issue with the items outside schools funded from DSG i.e. PRU resources, inclusion, SEN services. Potentially there could be an impact on the level of funding available in the Schools Budget for these areas and for Southwark's maintained schools.

Officers raised this with DfES and received funding to compensate for 2006/07 and 2007/08. They will be reviewing for 2008/09 onwards. We will push for the central items to be excluded from the DSG before the average is calculated for the academies deduction.

The Local Authority funding block (Council funded) is unaffected by the changed status of schools becoming academies. Resources coming into the authority are unchanged as the relative needs formula is based on two measures of pupil population which both include pupils in academies.

13. Can you give assurances that the site problems relating to the two proposed academies, East Dulwich Boys and Walworth Schools, are now resolved? Could you set out the definitive position on the Walworth Academy proposals in the light of the Aylesbury estate regeneration programme and the current split site of Walworth School? Could you also tell us if site problems relating to Sacred Heart are now resolved?

Comment from scrutiny project manager: Two responses were provided for this question. The first response is how the executive member would have responded to the question if asked at the October 11 2006 scrutiny meeting. The second response is the executive member's update on the current situation at October 31 2006.

Original response

The project management team supporting the development of the Harris Boys' Academy East Dulwich is currently preparing the planning submission for the establishment of the temporary boys' academy on the Breedinghurst site as of September 2007. This is expected to be submitted in October. In parallel, work is continuing on the funding agreement for the academy and the planning for the permanent buildings to be open in September 2009. Discussions are underway with the governors and staff of Breedinghurst school to address the practical issues around the temporary co-location.

The site for the Walworth Academy is likely to be the existing upper school site plus the strip of land adjacent to Shorncliffe Road and the footpath at the end of the site running parallel to the Old Kent Road. This site is agreeable to the sponsors and meets the aspirations of the Council's Executive.

Sacred Heart School will be rebuilt on its existing site. The school will need to be moved to a different site for a period of two years during the rebuild.

Update at 31 October 2006

Unfortunately the Department for Education and Skills, with the agreement of the sponsor, Lord Harris, has decided that the 2007 opening of the Harris Boys' Academy in temporary buildings is not possible saying they have concerns over the proposed use of part of the Breedinghurst School site.

The Council was not party to, nor does it agree with this decision. We have always recognised that any temporary school location would have some difficulties which we would have to overcome. Our view was that these could be addressed by proper planning and by putting in place robust management arrangements. To this end the Council had offered additional resources, including the support of an additional Headteacher during the two year period of the temporary arrangements.

The Government claimed that there would be risks to pupils of the proposed location. The Council would never put any Southwark pupil at risk of harm. We have been recognised by the Home Office for our Safer Schools Initiative work and this includes travel to and from school. Southwark Police Borough Commander Malcolm Tillyer has looked into this issue and has stated no risk assessment has been made or cleared

through the chain of command and that any views expressed should not be taken as the views of local police.

Unfortunately, it would appear that our views and offer of support was ignored and the decision was taken without proper consultation with the local authority. This causes us a great deal of regret and concern. Local members of the Council have been vigorous in arguing for the school to be opened in 2007 and had managed to reopen discussions after earlier moves by the Government and sponsor to abandon this aim.

We recognise the distress that this will cause to people in the local community, in particular parents of boys who could have benefited from the new school being open in 2007. We will continue to push for the boys' academy to open in permanent accommodation no later than the planned date of 2009. In the meantime, we are seeking urgent meetings with Ministers to try to get the temporary buildings back on track.

14. The council's Corporate Plan 2006-2007 at page 38 identifies as a key project the preparation of a feasibility study for additional primary provision in North Dulwich of at least 30 places. The action/aim is "to undertake a study to identify practical options and funding to satisfy need for additional places". The target is "to produce completed proposals ready to allow capital bid for inclusion in 2007/2008 year" and the officer responsible is Alison Delyth. -

- a. Will this key project be achieved on time (i.e. by November 2006)? If not, why not?**
- b. Please describe the present state of this project, and give a resume of work already done.**
- c. In particular, what specific steps have been taken to date to assess local demand for additional primary places in North Dulwich?**
- d. What capital bid is likely to be included for the 2007/08 financial year?**

- a) The Council's Executive will receive a report on the proposals for primary school investment across the borough as part of the Outline Business Case for Southwark Schools for the Future. This is due to be placed before Executive in December but this will depend on the timetable for the overall Capital Programme for the Council. The November deadline will not be met because, of necessity, we have been concentrating efforts in recent months on development of the BSF package and this has stretched resources to the limit. In addition, we cannot make proposals for one part of the borough without assessing demands across the whole borough.
- b) As part of the overall Primary Estate Strategy we have carried out the following work:
 - Revised pupil projections using a new robust methodology to establish need
 - Full review of the existing estate in respect of suitability, sufficiency and condition
 - High level options development for the whole estate to establish probable overall programme costs for its renewal.
- c) The revised pupil projections have been developed using the outcome of the parent survey conducted by the Dulwich Community Council as an important factor. In addition, officers have been identifying potential innovative solutions for North Dulwich but this requires further discussion with stakeholders before options can be put forward for decision.
- d) We are not yet in a position to assess the likely size of any bid that might be included in 2007/08.

20. Can you give an update on the Early Years/Community Nursery review?

The review is well underway and is being undertaken within the context of The Childcare Act 2006, which makes explicit the Council's responsibility in relation to:

- Ensuring that there is high quality and accessible childcare for any parent who wishes to return to work/study
- Supporting the development of a childcare market
- Improved services for families and children in order to improve early education outcomes and reduce vulnerability (children's centres).
- Raising standards of both childcare and education in all settings

There is a raft of new guidance that will directly inform any future developments in early years provision.

As part of the review all community nurseries have been visited in order to:

- seek the views of staff and community members who are responsible for each community nursery
- gain as broad a view as possible of the efficiency, effectiveness and overall viability of the community nurseries
- establish the extent to which grant funding has assisted nurseries to become self-sustaining
- identify the effectiveness of existing support currently provided by the LA and other support agencies (eg SCCF)

The review is also analysing current expenditure on Council-run early years centres/children's centres. This will inform future financial models aimed at addressing some of the funding anomalies, particularly in relation to the minimum free entitlement for 4 and 5 year-olds. The aim is to develop a funding formula that is based on an age-weighted-pupil-unit, mirroring the formula that is currently applied in primary schools. Other issues that are being addressed include:

- the adequacy of the level of funding for the minimum free entitlement (MFE) and the impact on the PVI sector
- the impact on the PVI sector of primary/nursery schools offering full time provision for 4-and 5-year-olds

The allocation of child care places for vulnerable children has been reviewed across social care, health and education. In placing vulnerable children it is imperative that the needs of the child and his/her family are the highest priority. New processes are to be established to ensure that a more substantial family support package is provided, so that the root causes of a child's vulnerability are addressed.

A team-around-the-child model similar to that which is being developed for children with disabilities may be recommended. The Government's requirement to concentrate services within the Children's Centres has significant implications when considering how best to support vulnerable young children and their families and where they are placed.

We aim to have completed the review and developed recommendations by the end of the year.

21. How do SASBU, the police and the Youth Service work together when a young person starts down the road of getting an ASBO?

The focus is upon early intervention to reinforce boundaries in relation to unacceptable behaviour and to address the underlying causes with the option of escalating to enforcement activity in the event of non-compliance. However, some behaviours are sufficiently serious as to require immediate enforcement activity in order to protect victims. This is agreed through ASBO conferences, led by SASBU, with input from the YOT, Children's Services, and other partner agencies.

A YOT officer seconded to SASBU co-ordinates the intervention through, where possible and appropriate, an Acceptable Behaviour Contract with the young person and their parents setting out expectations and prohibitions. A range of support services can be engaged including counselling, work with parents, and positive activities provided in partnership with the Youth Service. More complex cases requiring multi-agency intervention are referred to the Youth Inclusion and Support Panels, and those where a serious risk of harm to the public are indicated, are referred to the Risk Management Panel, which reviews the cases of prolific and priority offenders. Both panels are properly constituted to make judgements concerning applications for ASBOs where appropriate, which enables a rapid response to issues of concern.

At times neighbourhood concerns relate to groups of young people rather than simply individuals. Intelligence is shared via the Partnership Operations Group of the Safer Southwark Partnership, and the YOT, Youth Service, Street Wardens, and Police can be mobilised to provide a mixture of visible presence on the streets as a deterrent to perpetrators and reassurance to the public, and diversionary activities for young people.

23. What management and/or reporting tools are in place to monitor progress towards the targets set out in the Children and Young People's Plan (C&YPP)? Do you believe these tools are adequate to alert you if targets are likely to be missed?

Yes. There is a well established performance reporting system covering the full set of Every Child Matters indicators, including all those in the CYPP. Progress is considered on a quarterly basis by the Young Southwark Executive, of which I am a member, and cascaded down throughout the relevant delivery arms, e.g. Children's specialist services consider relevant social care data on a monthly basis.

The relative strength and maturity of this arrangement was complimented during the recent APA inspection.

It is the aim of the framework to quickly "red light" any performance indicator (PI) that is going in the wrong direction, and this has largely been achieved so far, although continuous improvement to data quality is required to maximize the effectiveness of monitoring such a large and diverse range of performance indicators.

24. Are there any targets in the C&YPP which you do not anticipate achieving, and if so why?

At this early stage of the CYPP there are no targets that we would rule out achieving. However we have set ourselves deliberately challenging targets to stretch services and it would be an exceptional achievement to deliver all of them by 2008. Our performance management system will identify if there are any areas where insufficient progress has been made to deliver the target.

Perhaps the most challenging target is for teenage pregnancy, which was set by central government for Southwark at a 60% reduction between 1998 and 2010. Although progress is now being made, insufficient progress was made towards the interim milestone of a 15% reduction by 2004 for the 2010 target to be seen as readily achievable. But at this stage we believe it is possible to make a step change and will be working towards it.

25. In particular, are there any targets in the C&YPP which you think may be missed because there are insufficient resources available?

No, not beyond teenage pregnancy, as they were set taking into account current budgets. In the case of teenage pregnancy, as we review further action that could improve prospects of hitting the target, we are identifying some additional resource needs. Initially these have been met by reallocating existing partnership funding at the margins, but more may be needed. We are looking now at opportunities to draw in more money from external sources.

26. Are there any areas where the performance of your department is particularly strong which you would like to draw to our attention?

I would like to draw attention to a number of teams in the education department who are performing particularly well:

- The SEN and Inclusion team is well-led and managed and performance indicators are consistently met. Earlier this year Brunswick Park Primary School achieved the national Inclusion Charter Mark. Nick Hammil, Headteacher at Lyndhurst Primary School, has been seconded as SEN and Inclusion Adviser and is working on implementation of the new parts of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Schools receive an exceptionally good level of support when it is necessary for them to deal with sensitive safeguarding issues. John Guest, lead officer in Education for safeguarding, is one of the most highly regarded officers by schools who nominated him for the Big Thank You Star Award earlier this year.
- The BSF project team are exceptionally able and dedicated and perform well in an area of immense complexity, strict deadlines and challenging external demands. By 2015, Southwark's schools will have received massive injections of capital investment.

In social care there are a number of high performing areas which helped the organisation obtain 3 stars under the old performance rating system - a recognition of strong performance achieved by just 18% of Local Authorities. An area of particular strength is the stability of placements for looked after children, with the following notable achievements:

- High numbers of children being fostered (202 households in Southwark are approved foster carers)
- 80% of Children Looked After placed within 7 miles of their home
- Each foster carer signs an agreement whereby attendance at Personal Education Plans and parents evening and commitment to education is an essential component of care
- All fostering households have a computer and all Southwark foster carers will begin a rolling programme of computer training and support children with online learning attached to their schools curriculum.

27. Are there any areas where the performance of your department is presently falling short of what might reasonably be expected? If so, what are you doing about it?

In 2005/06 there was a deterioration in the area of duration on the child protection register (for more than the benchmark of two years) which will feature as a criticism in our 2006 APA. This was identified as a problem quickly during the year but not before we could prevent the indicator being undermined. An action plan was put in place to ensure that thorough reviews of child protection arrangements are carried out around the 18 month point. This has already impacted and latest data shows the problem has been resolved with very good performance so far in 2006/07.

Other areas of concern include the high rates of teenage conceptions, the education of children looked after and the need to improve levels of attainment across the board. These areas are being accorded a high degree of priority by both myself and the officers concerned and we are working to ensure the necessary strategies and actions are in place to bring about recognisable change.