

Southwark Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Executive Interview - January 19 2010

Questions to Councillor Stanton:

Question 14

How is the Council ensuring a smooth transfer of all post 16 education from the Learning and Skills Council to Southwark Education?

Answer

In 2007, we pre-empted the transfer by creating the 14-19 Partnership team to take over these functions.

In 2008/9, we took part in a full 'dry run' of the further education commissioning process, creating a shadow commissioning plan. The lessons learnt from that experience have fed into plans for this year's commissioning process which we are leading. The LSC has been fully supportive of our plans.

Question 15

How is the Council coordinating all the many agencies offering post 16 work experience and placements; and how is the Council ensuring good quality placements and teaching?

Answer

We have our own team, the Southwark Education Business Alliance, which provides work experience placements for the borough's institutions. It is now the main provider since Trident, a national provider went out of business in June 2009.

However, schools and colleges can purchase work experience placements from any provider they choose. If a school or college chooses to purchase work experience placements from another provider we will encourage them to ensure that the provider meets the National Standard for Work Experience by providing information and advice.

Question 16

Is the Leader satisfied with the progress of the Southwark BSF programme? Have any financial problems arisen due to the current economic climate?

Answer

I am pleased with the progress of the BSF programme. There have been challenges as the programme has moved out of the procurement phase and there have been delays to some of the pre-construction target milestones for the second wave of projects. However, these delays have been associated with the necessary review and approval processes that ensure designs meet our aspirations, and that they remain value for money.

We still expect that the overall programme will continue to run broadly to schedule, with Phase 2 projects due to start on site as planned in Summer 2010.

Phase 1 BSF projects, St Michael's Catholic School and Tuke Special School, are on site and are progressing on programme and within their budgets.

Planning of phase 3 of the BSF programme is well progressed and is expected to be approved by Partnerships for School's by the end of the financial year.

Question 17

What remedial measures are now in place to ensure that KS 2 English and Maths results improve in those Primary Schools where results have not been as good as the previous year?

Answer

The majority of schools have seen increases in results in recent years, allowing us to post our best ever results at Key Stage 2 this year placing us in the second quartile nationally for the first time. However, where results in individual schools are lower than last year, schools receive intensive support from our Achievement Team to identify the causes, and to improve results. There is very strong evidence that where the Achievement Team provides intensive support for schools there is rapid improvement over and above improvement rates in non supported schools.

The 2009 tracking data from four schools predicted a fall in results related to identified cohort factors. These schools were already in receipt of intensive Local Authority support and will continue to receive intensive support from our Achievement Team. Predictions for 2010 show improvement.

Several more schools (7) returned maths and English results that were not as good as in 2008. These decreases were unexpected, and occurred in schools which had been judged to be 'good' by Ofsted. Three of these schools are now in receipt of higher levels of council support which means that they are subject to termly monitoring and we scrutinise their tracking data. Three of the schools have provided convincing evidence that the dip in results was cohort related and that there will be a significant improvement in 2010. The other school has been brought into a National programme that focuses on writing which is where the need has been identified.

There is now only one primary school in Southwark that has been identified by the DCFS as 'hard to shift' in terms of standards and we expect this particular school to return significantly improved results above floor targets in 2010.

Question 18

What does the Executive member see as the biggest challenges to the department over the next 24 months for Southwark primary schools?

Answer

- Increasing rolls
- Potential for post general election funding cuts to school budgets

Question 19

In light of the continuing financial crisis and the number of homes being repossessed, can the Executive member/s;

- i. Advise what impact this has had on the education of children whose families have had their homes repossessed?
- ii. Advise what safeguards are in place particularly for those children who have had to be withdrawn or transferred to other schools within or outside of the

- borough to ensure that any detrimental effects on their education are minimised?
- iii. Confirm that every effort is being made to ensure that any necessary advice and assistance is being offered for these families? – and confirm what advice and assistance is being offered.
 - iv. Advise how families access this advice/assistance, - i.e., are they contacted independently after repossession, or do families have to find out about such assistance themselves?

Answer

Where a school is made aware of a problem which is likely to impact upon the wellbeing of a student, they will provide individual support to that student if necessary. Where a child changes schools, it is the duty of the receiving school to contact the previous school within 10 working days to ensure that records are exchanged, so as to minimise the impact on the child of the transfer.

Where we become aware that a family may be facing repossession, we will arrange an appointment with the family to discuss the options available to them to firstly try and prevent their homelessness, and where this is not possible look to secure suitable alternative accommodation for them. Once possession proceedings have been actioned, the Courts will normally sign-post families to the Council or to the voluntary advice agencies throughout the borough so that households can access appropriate advice and assistance.

Question 20

Though very welcome, please explain what contribution the expansion of St Anthony's RC Primary School will make towards helping address under-capacity in the East Dulwich area?

Answer

The proposal to expand St. Anthony's from 1.5 to 2FE will provide 15 additional places in Dulwich each year, increasing the total from 315 to 420 when complete. It is a popular school with more than 80 first preference applications for 45 places. In 2009/10 89% of applications came from Southwark residents.

An analysis has been undertaken of the first preference applications in the last two school years at St. Anthony's. Of the unsuccessful applications, 23 in 2008/9 and 17 in 2009/10 received a place at another Southwark voluntary school, with 17 in 2008/09 and 19 in 2009/10 offered a Southwark community primary. The remainder (9 in 2008/9 and 7 in 2009/10) took up places in other boroughs, were withdrawn or went to an independent school.

On this evidence there is a case for expansion as the additional places would mostly be allocated to Southwark residents, freeing up spaces in other local schools to help meet the additional demand. However, the situation will be kept under review depending on the pattern of applications in future years.

Question 21

Do you think there is a need to address the incongruity of children living just outside that year's catchment area of their nearest school, who end up because of distance from their remaining choices, only being accepted into the 4th, 5th or sometimes even 6th choice?

Answer

None of our community primary schools operate formal catchment areas. Instead, oversubscription criteria dictate how places are filled where a school has more applications than places. The so called double distance criteria allows priority to be given to families that want to choose their closest Southwark community primary school over those who had a choice of an alternative Southwark community primary school nearer to their home.

Although this rule is still in place for 2010 admissions, we are consulting on removing it from the 2011 admissions process. This will make the process more straightforward, and as Southwark has 42 community primary schools spread across the borough, should still enable most families to apply to a school fairly close to their home.

Question 22

Do you have any views about the inconsistent level of Sports Provision across Southwark Schools?

Answer

The provision which schools make for physical activity and sport is the responsibility of the headteacher and governing body, regulated through Ofsted.

Schools in Southwark are supported through the Healthy Schools Programme, School Sports Coordinators (provided through Bacon's and HGAED), PRO-ACTIVE Southwark and the Community Sport and Physical Activity Network, (CSPAN) and a range of partners to deliver and further develop their offer of sport and PE provision. Council officers are working with partners to develop a framework for the coordination and delivery of the 5 Hour Offer which should improve uptake by schools. The external support available includes:

- the Schools Sport Partnerships Competition Manager, funded by Youth Sport Trust, to support all schools with a comprehensive competitive sports framework
- the School Sport Associations which are also active in linking schools inside and outside Southwark to London wide competitive opportunities
- LBS Southwark Community Games, programme across 50 schools per week, and a series of competitions through the year.