

Minutes

For: Admissions and Place Planning Forum

Date: 12 June 2019

Time: 16:00 – 18:00

Location: Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

Attendees:

Chair

Councillor Julianne Marriott: Cabinet Member for Education (JM)

Councillor Jane Lofthouse: Deputy Cabinet Member for Education (JL)

Local Authority Officers

Peter Gibb: Head of Access and Infrastructure (PG)

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

Manjit Bains: Commissioner Education Place Planning (MB)

Clerk

Kiran Parkash Singh: Pupil Services

Representative: Nursery Schools

Nicola Hayden: Head Teacher, Oliver Thomas Nursery School

Representatives: Maintained Primary Schools

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School

Sue Ferguson: Head Teacher, Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

Representatives: Maintained Secondary Schools

Anthony Wilson: Lister Community School (Chair of Newham Association of Secondary Head teachers - NASH)

Representative: Academy Primary Schools

Paul Harris: CEO Tapscott Learning Trust

Quintin Peppiatt: New Vision Trust

Representatives: Academy Secondary Schools

Andrew Seager: Head Teacher, Stratford School Academy

Gillian Dineen: Head Teacher, The Cumberland School

Peter Whittle: Associate Principal, Langdon Academy

Representative Single Sex School

Charlotte Robinson: Head Teacher, Rokeby School

Representative: Virtual School

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

Apologies

Anne Kibuuka: Head Teacher, Kay Rowe Nursery School & Forest Gate Children's Centre

Ian Wilson: Head Teacher, Little Ilford Primary School

Diane Rochford: Executive Head, John F Kennedy Special School

Paul Halliwell: Head Teacher, St Bonaventure's Catholic Comprehensive School

Shirley Ann Jones: Head Teacher, St. James' CoE Junior School

Matt Hipperson: Head Teacher, St. Luke's CoE Primary School

Gael Hicks: Head Teacher, St Helen's Roman Catholic Primary School

Geoffrey Fowler: Principal, London Design and Engineering UTC

Simon McKenzie, Interim Head of Service 0-25 SEND

Key

Secondary Head Teacher – SHT

Primary Head Teacher - PHT

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Action Points

Item 2a. Summer Born Admissions

LA to provide training to schools to support consistent approach to summer born deferment requests. Check webpages to ensure clarity of information.

Chair of NASH to speak with colleagues to identify any own admission schools considering changing their arrangements to admit summer born children into year 8 from primary school.

Item 2d. Nursery Admission

Director for Education to include information about the local closing and offer dates in newsletter and to present item at Education Partnership Conference.

Item 3a. Faith Representative

Chair of NASH to speak to colleagues to obtain expressions of interest for a secondary school faith representative.

Item 3f. Composite Prospectus school vote

LA officers to notify the borough's communications team of the outcome of vote.

Item 5 – Fair Access Protocol

LA to circulate latest draft to schools.

Chair of NASH to liaise with colleagues to agree definitions to be circulated to wider NASH group. Deadline – 17 July 2019. Protocol to be implemented on 1 September 2019.

Item 6. Alternative Allocations

JM to liaise with colleagues in Pan London Boroughs to write a joint letter to chair of London Inter Admissions Authority Group to request message on the eadmissions site to advise applicants to name six preferences and the potential impact of only naming a few schools.

Forum members to bring forward proposals to current process to be discussed at extraordinary forum meeting for consideration. Meeting date TBC.

LA to provide training to primary schools over secondary transition and beginning the process in year 5.

Chair of NASH to feedback forum's request to hold open days in the summer term to colleagues for consideration.

1. Introductions

Chair introduced herself and asked the other members of the forum to do the same.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous forum meeting were reviewed. All present confirmed that it was an accurate recording of the discussions.

2.a Summer born admissions

TJ provided the forum with an update. There had been a recent increase in applications to defer entry into the reception year group to the following year. She had recently met with

the head teacher of Park Primary School who has advised that a group of parents had set up a social media group to support summer born applications and potentially challenge the local authority and the school if a request is refused. TJ advised that the visit to Park Primary had been beneficial for the school and asked the forum whether a training session around summer born admissions for head teachers and school staff would be useful. This would help ensure that schools had a consistent approach when deciding on a deferment request. All agreed that it would be.

A PHT advised that schools are being viewed in negative light when requests have been refused and that there had been anecdotal evidence that unions were instigating agitation by blaming head teachers. In addition it is believed that some nursery settings were encouraging parents to request summer born deferment in order to keep children at their provision for another year.

The PHT also advised that once parents were notified of the potential issue when the child is due to start secondary school (i.e. may have to start in year 8, based on age rather than year 7) they were changing their minds about deferring.

JM advised that she was aware of some nursery settings writing letters supporting parental requests to defer.

A SHT added that the possibility of children starting secondary school in year 8 rather than in year 7 needed to be made clearer to parents and should be highlighted to them when the requests are made. In addition the forum should maybe consider changing the admission arrangements to reflect that.

TJ added that some own admission authority schools in other local authorities had already amended their arrangements to state that summer born children will start secondary school in year 8.

JM requested secondary head teachers to check with colleagues whether any own admission authority schools were considering including this in their arrangements.

TJ also invited head teachers to look at the Office of Schools Adjudicator (OSA) website to review the challenges some local authorities such as the London Borough of Richmond had faced over summer born.

2.b Office of Schools Adjudicator

Discussed under agenda item 4

2.c Fair Access Protocol

Discussed under agenda item 5

2.d Nursery Admissions

TJ provided an update to the forum. It was agreed at the previous forum that Newham would have a local application closing and offer date. These dates were finalised as follows;

Application window – 1 January to 15 May 2020

Offer date 15 June 2020

The normal application process will not change and applicants will still need to apply directly to the nurseries.

The local authority will be undertaking borough wide advertising and publishing information

for parents in the Starting primary school autumn 2019 edition and the Newham website.

A PHT asked whether this information had been circulated to all schools so that they were aware and if all schools had signed up to these dates and new process. JM advised that information will be included in the Director for Education's newsletter as well as be presented at the next Education Partnership Conference meeting.

A PHT raised a wider concern about children coming from PVI's into their school with a lack of information about their special educational or social care needs. They were aware that different areas within the local authority had information on early years children but it appeared that these areas were not working together to collate the information to support schools.

Another PHT added that some PVI's were not including the SEND needs of children at their provision on their database which meant that when this was being sent to the local authority, it was resulting in the imbalance of the data held by the different service areas.

JM responded by notifying the panel that this was not the arena for this discussion but acknowledged the importance of sharing data for the benefit of the school as well as for child and family.

3 Standing Items

3.a Membership

JM advised that vacancies had arisen for members from the voluntary aided faith sector and also for a nursery representative.

This will be raised at the next Newham Association of Secondary Heads (NASH). Nursery head teachers had already been approached for expression of interest and officers were currently waiting on feedback.

3.b New academy conversions and proposed new free schools

TJ outlined the latest schools that have converted into an academy. St Edward's RC Primary School and St Francis RC Primary School have recently applied to join the Our Lady of Grace multi academy trust from September 2019.

North Beckton Primary School formally converted to an academy on 1st April 2019.

PG provided an update on the application for a special school in Newham. The specification was published in March and an event was held for proposer groups and parent representatives. So far 12 groups had expressed an interest in putting in a bid. The deadline for the bids is 30 September 2019 and a decision on the successful applicant will be made jointly by the London Borough of Newham and the Department for Education. A decision is expected in early 2020.

The school could open in 2021 or 2022 at the earliest. Other options for the special needs provision in Newham being looked into were the feasibility of opening annexes to existing special schools on mainstream sites.

3.c Consultations

A SHT asked if there was an update to the University Technical College potentially converting into a full secondary school. TJ advised that there had been no update from the UTC but that was not to say it will not happen. There were current conversations but no formal notification of consultation.

| A SHT whose school had recently converted into a foundation school and was now part of a

trust (MAT), advised the forum of what that actually entailed. The Newham Community Schools Trust (NCST) is responsible for one Academy (Sarah Bonnell School) and two foundation schools (Lister Community School and Rokeby School), which are federated. The NCST Board Trustees therefore, exercise the roles of Trustees for the MAT. Governors of the federation Governing Body for all 3 schools, retain local Governing Bodies and operate under the Joint Scheme of Delegation.

3.d Place Planning

MB provided an update on the Newham's place planning programme. The forecasts had not changed since the previous forum. Expansion had been agreed at Lister Community School which will see the school permanently expand by two forms of entry by 2021. Little Ilford Secondary School was also being considered for expansion by two forms, subject to agreement by the school's governing body.

A forum member asked whether any vacant land sites or assets that are designated with an education use across the borough were being protected and earmarked for potential future expansion or new free school use. PG advised the Basic Needs funding was available for expansion of existing schools; and a list of other sites across the borough was being kept under review with Newham's Asset Management team.

A PHT asked what analysis was being undertaken by the local authority to look into SEND and place planning in relation to children with special needs coming through from Early Years into reception and those currently in years four and five who will be starting secondary school in future years. The authority needed to ensure there was a coordinated approach to this.

PG advised that modelling has been done and this formed part of the special school bid. However it is acknowledged that further SEND data analysis is required.

A PHT said that plans were being made for the future but there appeared to be no immediate concern about the SEND provision in the borough. PG advised that an annexe for John F Kennedy Special school is being planned for autumn 2019 which would help resolve some of the immediate pressures and that further annexes are being planned for 2020-21.

A SHT stated that due to insufficient provisions for SEND children in the borough, schools were being asked to admit into the mainstream setting when they need either a resource provision or special school place.

JM advised that further updates on Newham's plans for children with SEND will be provided at future forums.

3e. Admission Arrangements

TJ advised that it had been agreed in previous forums that the admission arrangements will be reviewed at each summer term forum. Outside of the objection to the OSA and alternative allocations (both separate agenda items) the forum were asked if there was a need to review the arrangements. This would be for admission in 2021 as the arrangements for 2020 had already been determined. All agreed that there was no need to make any other changes to the arrangements.

3f. Vote on schools for photoshoot of school prospectuses

Schools had previously been asked to express an interest in being nominated to feature in

the borough's annual composite prospectuses. Of the schools nominated, the panel voted for Manor Primary School for the primary prospectus and Lister School for secondary.

4. Objection to the Office of Schools Adjudicator.

TJ provided the forum with an update on the objection the OSA had received from a Newham head teacher who raised a concern that year 6 children at their school were not being offered a place at a local secondary school.

This triggered the OSA to look the determined arrangements more closely which resulted in them raising a concern about the definition of staff children (that it was missing the definition of staff members that would be considered a priority). This will be remedied, however it is possible that the OSA may also require clarification of other parts of the arrangements.

In addition if schools wanted to admit outside of the legal definition of 'staff' outside of STEM teachers then they will need to provide a detailed report as to why the member of staff for whom priority is being requested meets the requirements of the definition outlined in the School Admissions Code.

A SHT said that it was increasingly becoming difficult to recruit good teachers outside of STEM subjects too, especially SEND teachers.

A forum member asked how many children were offered secondary school places under the staff priority. TJ advised that although many applicants ticked the staff application option on the online form there were only five verified staff applications.

5. Fair Access Protocol

The latest draft version of the Fair Access Protocol was presented to the forum. The 2014 version was now outdated and pupil placement panel (where fair access cases are considered) was using interim arrangements that now needed to be formalised and included in the new protocol. In addition advice had been sought from the DfE which had now been used to tighten up the protocol and give schools more clarity about requests for information about pupils. The intention was to have the protocol finalised to be implemented from September 2019.

A forum member raised concerns about section 7 of the protocol and the definition of challenging pupils. TJ responded that the authority had previously requested head teachers to develop a definition of 'challenging' pupils that could be incorporated into the protocol. If the definitions cannot be agreed upon then it would not be possible to continue with the interim arrangements as the authority would be opening itself up to challenge.

JM stated that once the protocol was finalised it will need to be reviewed. TJ advised that if the protocol is implemented from September then it will be reviewed by a working party in the spring term.

A SHT said that they will meet with other heads to develop a definition of challenging pupils that will be circulated to the wider headship to agree or provide alternatives.

6. Alternative Allocation Policy

It had been requested at previous forums that the alternative allocation policy be reviewed as it had been considered by some members of the forum to be unfair, resulting in inequities in the number of allocations being made to undersubscribed schools.

PG outlined the current alternative allocation process (places allocated based on closest school with a place available) and provided detail of the rationale that sits behind it. If a new process was going to be considered then the authority will have to go to Cabinet for members to agree to the change and to formal consultation. Whatever process the authority

decided to use it has to be both lawful and manageable.

PG explained three potential alternative methods to the current process that could be combined in a number of different ways.

1. Random draw – child's name and allocated school are both randomly drawn.
2. Even distribution – Each school with places is given an equal share of children sequentially regardless of the number of vacancies.
3. Proportional distribution – places allocated based on vacancies at a school as a proportion of their overall vacancy or admission number.

Some of the options are solely be based on a random draw basis whilst others also factor in home to school distance.

A SHT stated that there was a need to change the current process to ensure fairness to undersubscribed schools. Home to school distance is not a real consideration for a borough the size of Newham. In addition some schools that may geographically be of some distance can be easier and quicker to get to (by transport) then other schools that are closer but more difficult to get to. More needed to be done to support undersubscribed schools.

A PHT added that home to school distance is more of a primary issue, and that as secondary school children receive free bus passes home to school distance has become less relevant. However if a new policy was going to be introduced it did need to consider circumstances where some children should not enter certain areas or postcodes due to possible gang affiliations or other safety reasons. It was however highlighted that that could also be an issue under the current process.

A SHT stated that home to school distance is still a factor for parents. Their school had received a number of alternative allocations and parents of those children were advising that the school was too far and were refusing admission. This was creating additional work for the school and it was unlikely that it will be resolved before September. If a new policy was going to be introduced then it was important that it will be a process that parents will buy into also.

PG added that it was unlikely that any process will resolve parents' dissatisfaction with not being offered their first (or any) preference school.

A SHT stated that late applications also needed to be looked at, as under the current process they could all end up in a single school as they could be the only remaining school with vacancies. If children were joining the school throughout the course of the academic year when the process becomes in year, then that school will face particular challenges of trying to maintain education standards. There was a need for a fair and equitable system.

A possible solution the SHT suggested was rather than some schools opening bulge classes to meet the additional demand for school places, all schools should agree to over allocate by 1-2% should space be required. This would prevent schools having vacant spaces in the future should demand secondary school places decrease. TJ responded by stating that if schools were to do this then the places would have to be offered from the waiting list for that school and could not be reserved for alternative allocations.

They also asked whether any analysis had been done with primary schools to see how many preferences are being named on the application form. Two PHT stated that since the shift to submitting applications online it has become increasingly difficult to work with parents to ensure they name as many schools as they can as a preference. However parents are always strongly advised to name six preferences.

TJ added that each local authority had a statutory duty to ensure that all children resident in the borough have a school place and that all schools in the area had to participate in the

alternative allocation process. In addition a new process will have to be applied to both primary and secondary schools admissions and cannot be isolated to admission under the normal points of entry. It would also have to be applied to in year admissions to avoid a two tier process. Whatever decision is made it will have an impact on families. It was also important to factor in how the gender split would work in any new process.

A forum member asked what other local authorities use. TJ advised that the majority base alternative allocations on home to school distance.

A PHT suggested that primary schools should start working with parents when their child is in year 5 so that they will be better placed to make informed decisions when completing the application. TJ added that information at year 5 is really important as a large number of applications are submitted of the first few weeks of the processing opening at the start of September.

A PHT asked if the composite prospectuses could be issued earlier in the year. TJ advised that prospectuses must be issued in September at the start of each academic year. The PHT then suggested that guidance should be circulated to schools to hold a transition event for year 5 pupils and that a training event be held alongside the summer born training to ensure all schools have the required information to support parents to make informed decision when applying for a secondary school place.

A PHT asked if secondary school open days could be moved to the summer term as it would allow parents more time to think about the application process. It was agreed that this could be a positive move as it would alert parents to the transition process at an earlier stage.

JM advised the panel that if there was an agreement that there needed to be a change to the alternative allocation process, then it was for forum members to bring forward proposals before the consultation period starts. There would need to be an extraordinary meeting of the forum before September to discuss any new proposals, then take to Cabinet to seek approval and then consult.

It was agreed that another meeting will be held before the end of term and that members should bring any alternatives to the current process to allow sufficient time to be presented to Cabinet prior to consultation. This will be discussed at NASH and NAPH to allow other head teachers (not members of the forum) to propose alternatives.

The forum did decide however that random allocation was not a viable alternative to home to school distance and should not be considered as one of the alternative options.

7. SEND Admissions

PG presented a paper (following concerns raised by head teachers) the local authority had developed a process to manage new to the borough school applications for children with special educational needs. The process had mainly been put together for children new to the country for whom very little was known. For children moving to Newham from other parts of the UK there was usually already sufficient information to make a decision about whether child was mainstream or if a more specialist provision would be required.

The main headline was that for some cases, specialist services from Newham's 0-25 SEND Department will carry out an initial assessment (within 10 school days of referral) child's needs to determine what type of education provision would best meet the child's needs

A SHT stated that assessments should not be limited to children from abroad as there were children coming through from other parts of the UK where they would not be able to manage in a mainstream environment. There should be a panel of SEND experts from schools and the local authority to assess where the child's needs will be best met. The SHT felt that decisions currently being made were not in the best interest of the child or school

community.

A PHT raised concerns about the ability of the service areas to make informed decisions as, for the majority of cases, schools were being advised to admit and assess. What has happened to assessment places?

A SHT added that assessment places are ok to determine need. However as there currently aren't sufficient specialist places available, decisions are being made to admit children into mainstream school places. There is no option but to put children into mainstream.

PG responded by stating that this process was not being used to address the issue of lack of SEND spaces (this was being considered elsewhere). The concerns over the quality of assessments and decisions however will be fed back to relevant officers.

It was important however for school to understand that for children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), parental preference was important and has to be considered by the local authority. Going against parental preference would be challenging for the local authority to defend, particularly at SEND tribunals.

A PHT added that the authority need to reassess what their definition and vision for inclusion is. There is a need to separate personal opinions and viewpoints about inclusion and EHCPs to make decisions in the best interest of the child.

JM responded that for the majority of children with SEND (with or without an EHCP), an inclusive policy was the right option. It is recognise that for some children, a more specialist provision would be required and the local authority catered for them and was looking other short term options to increase the availability of specialist provisions, where currently demand outstrips supply. It was important however to consider the needs of the child, those of the school and the children already on roll.

TJ added that SEND admissions and alternative allocations were linked as currently for in year admissions, children from abroad with SEND were being allocated to schools with places available. This has resulted in a concentration of children with needs in certain schools. As a short term interim solution SEND children could be considered as part of the Fair Access Protocol. A PHT provided an example of a school with already a high population of children with needs that was given five children with additional needs in the space of a few weeks. This was not sustainable.

In addition the PHT added that the local authority needed to reconsider its views on inclusion. The demographics and needs of the population of the borough had changed but it appears that the local authority's view on inclusion were outdated and have not changed to reflect the needs of residents and those with SEND.

A PHT added that assessment places needed to be considered and that children should be put on a 'virtual roll' whilst the assessments were carried out. At the end of the assessment period, if a place at a specialist placement was required then it would streamline the process of putting the child onto a new roll. A head teacher added that it could be possible to put children onto a guest roll during the assessment period.

The discussion ended with the Forum being informed that the 0-25 SEND head of service will present the paper at the next Education Partnership Conference (SEND working group) where head teachers' concerns can be discussed further.

8. Any other business and close

JM notified the panel that Newham College of Further Education was currently not proceeding with plans to open a 14-19 provision. The forum will be updated should this change.

There had been a request from head teachers to amend the in year common application form to include the reasons the reason why a transfer was being sought from one Newham school to another. TJ added that this option was already available under the reasons for preference however she will follow this up with JM.

Although they were unable to attend, JM thanked Paul Halliwell (leaving Newham) and Anne Kibuuka (retiring) for their welcomed and significant contributions to the forum.

Sue Ferguson and the school team at Ellen Wilkinson Primary School were thanked for their hospitality.

Meeting Closed 19:00

Proposed dates for 2019-20 meetings

13th/20th November 2019

11th/18th March 2020

10th June 2020

End.

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