

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 16TH OCTOBER, 2025** at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Sylvia McNamara (Chair), Julian Fulbrook, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Patricia Leman, Tom Simon and Nanouche Umeadi

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Lotis Bautista and Matt Cooper

Co-opted Members Sarah Jafri, Margaret Harvey and Camden Youth Council representative

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from Committee Members were received from Councillor Lotis Bautista, Councillor Matt Cooper and Margaret Harvey. Apologies were also received from Councillor Marcus Boyland.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webcasting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live to the internet and would be capable of repeated viewing and copies of the recording could be made available on request. Those participating in the meeting were deemed to be consenting to being filmed.

New Government Ministers

The Chair noted two recent government appointments. Georgia Gould, former Leader of Camden Council, had been appointed Minister of State for School Standards at the Department for Education (DfE). Josh MacAlister, who chaired the Independent Review of Children's Social Care - a national review that visited Camden and highlighted Camden's work as an example of good practice - and who subsequently became the MP for Whitehaven and Workington, had been appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, also at the DfE. The Chair gave congratulations on the new government appointments, noting that their experience would be valuable to the national agenda on education and children's services.

Farewell and Thanks to Dr Rachel Wrangham

The Chair noted that Dr Rachel Wrangham was no longer the secondary parent governor representative on the Committee, as she was no longer a parent governor. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair offered sincere thanks to Dr Wrangham for her valuable contribution and dedicated work over the past six years, particularly her role in the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) scrutiny panel investigation.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were no deputations.

5. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was no notification of urgent business.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

7. UPDATE ON PROVISIONAL SCHOOL EXAM RESULTS 2025

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning.

The Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning introduced and summarised the report which provided an early sight of the provisional school exam outcomes for the

2024-25 academic year for maintained schools in Camden for Early Years, the Year 1 Phonics check, Key Stages 2, 4 and 5. The paper included Early Years and primary results drawn from statutory national assessments submitted to and verified by the Department for Education (DfE), and secondary data collected directly from Camden schools to provide an early overview of performance. The report did not include Key Stage 1 outcomes, as statutory testing at age seven had been withdrawn, and progress measures for Key Stages 2 and 4 were unavailable due to the disruption of national examinations during the pandemic.

The Chair thanked Camden Learning for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- A Member expressed concern, asked for reasons, and how it would be addressed the decline in Key Stage 4 English and Maths results at both the standard and strong pass levels. They noted that while other results showed improvement, this downward trend was worrying, particularly given the importance of GCSE outcomes in making Camden's secondary school offer attractive to parents. Camden Learning explained that pupil numbers remained a concern across Camden and London and that making Camden schools more attractive was a priority. They said reasons for performance varied between schools and cohorts but highlighted that improving teacher ambition, teaching quality and subject knowledge were key to raising outcomes. The service was promoting teaching techniques that focused on vocabulary, oracy and subject-specific language to narrow the disadvantage gap. Attendance also continued to affect attainment. Recruitment of subject specialists, particularly in maths, science and computer science, remained challenging due to competition with industry salaries. Camden Learning said work was ongoing to ensure pupils were entered for appropriate exams, strengthen teaching practice, and share learning from schools performing well to support those with weaker results.
- A Member asked whether there was a breakdown of children who did not meet the expected phonics level in Year 1, noting that this group often included pupils with special educational needs or additional needs. They suggested that the data might not always reflect children's abilities accurately, as some may take longer to meet expected levels. The Member also asked whether Camden's wide disadvantage gap could be influenced by the borough's extremes of wealth and poverty, rather than by shortcomings in support for disadvantaged pupils. Camden Learning said that while the detailed phonics breakdown was not available at the meeting, historically there had been a clear disadvantage gap, and that children with special educational needs were disproportionately represented among those not meeting the expected level in Year 1. They agreed that disadvantage in Camden had complex causes, including cramped housing, limited study space and parents working multiple jobs, which affected children's opportunities outside school. They noted that schools could not control these factors but could help mitigate their impact through providing enriched experiences and high ambition for all pupils. Camden Learning added that Camden's disadvantage gaps were narrower than those nationally, which may reflect the strength of enrichment and opportunity within Camden schools.
- A Member asked that the validated exam results report clearly present differences in performance between Camden secondary schools, so that the

Committee could see which schools were performing well or less well and consider how they might support each other or where further support might be needed. The Member noted that overall figures could lose meaning without understanding the variation between schools and requested that comparisons also be made with London and national averages. Camden Learning confirmed that national school performance data and rankings would be publicly available by the time of the next report. They said the two highest-performing schools in Camden were all-girls schools, noting a gender difference in outcomes. Camden Learning explained that Fisher Family Trust targets were used to benchmark Camden schools against others nationally with similar pupil demographics and starting points. They added that while some Camden schools performed strongly against these benchmarks, others faced greater challenges due to differences in demographics, high pupil mobility, and varying levels of disadvantage. A Member said that while the performance data for Camden schools would be publicly available, it would be more helpful if future reports presented the key differences between schools directly to the Committee, rather than requiring members to refer to external league tables. The Member also asked for information comparing the performance of boys and girls in Camden with London and national averages, noting that gender differences in attainment were attracting increasing attention nationally. Camden Learning agreed that this comparison could be provided in a future report, showing how the performance of boys and girls in Camden compared with London and national outcomes.

- A Member asked whether future reports could include information on teacher turnover at primary and secondary level, noting that recruitment and retention challenges. They said it would be useful to understand what measures were in place to retain teachers, especially those at the start of their careers, and to help them remain in Camden schools. The Member also asked for further information on school attendance, including why some schools achieved consistently high attendance while others struggled, and how good practice could be shared. Camden Learning said that turnover data had been difficult to obtain but agreed it would be valuable to have. They outlined the work being done to retain teachers in Camden, including the Early Careers Framework, which all Camden schools had adopted, to create a sense of belonging and professional community. This included mentoring, training and celebration events for early career teachers. Camden Learning also promoted benefits available to teachers through the council's payroll scheme. They noted that flexible working remained a challenge in teaching but said a recent study on flexible working in Camden schools was being shared with headteachers at the upcoming January conference. In relation to attendance, Camden Learning said case studies of schools with high attendance were being compiled to share good practice and learning across schools, helping others replicate successful approaches within different community contexts. The Chair asked whether this case studies paper on schools that are 'bucking the trend' in attendance, could be shared with the Committee when it was ready, and Camden Learning agreed.

Action By: Chief Executive Officer, Camden Learning

- A Member noted that the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools appeared to have increased across phonics, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4,

though it was less clear at Key Stage 5. They asked why this might be the case and what action could be taken to close the gap. The Member also queried whether Camden's gap was wider than those seen in London and nationally, and asked for clarification on the data. Camden Learning said that the same schools were not consistently at the top or bottom of the performance range each year and that schools were, in many ways, fragile organisations with their own journeys and contexts. Performance could fluctuate due to changes in leadership, pupil demographics, or the arrival of new pupils with additional needs or who had recently arrived in the UK. Camden Learning said that when schools fell into the lowest quartile, targeted support was wrapped around them, with a granular focus on understanding whether issues were cohort-specific or part of a longer-term trend. They added that data was now more stable and meaningful following the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Around 40% of Camden pupils were classed as disadvantaged, a higher proportion than the national average, which affected outcomes. Camden Learning said disadvantaged children had been more impacted by the pandemic and agreed it would be useful to compare Camden's position with London data in future reports.

- A Member noted Camden's unusually high number of pupils moving into the independent sector and asked whether the provisional results being discussed were the same data schools used when presenting to parents during open evenings, or whether they relied on the previous year's results given the timing of national publication. Camden Learning said that many schools would publish their results on their websites before national data was released. They noted that last year's primary outcomes were strong, so this was less of an issue for primary admissions. Camden Learning said that the new Camden School Reports highlighted the breadth of curriculum and pupil experience rather than focussing solely on academic results or Ofsted ratings and this helped to promote Camden schools. They explained that parents were increasingly interested in the overall quality of their child's school experience. For post-16 education, Camden Learning said results would be available in time for open evenings and that schools would promote them directly. They added that a new Camden sixth-form website had just been launched, featuring videos and information about academic and vocational offers, including T-Levels, to support Year 10 and 11 pupils exploring post-16 options and to promote Camden's sixth-form provision.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

8. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2025 - 2028 AND FEEDBACK ON YOUTH JUSTICE INSPECTION - HER MAJESTY INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS (HMIP)

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture introduced the item, supported by the Head of Integrated Youth Justice Service. The report set out

performance from April 2024 to March 2025 and outlined the new priorities in the Camden Youth Justice Plan 2025–2028, alongside feedback from the recent HMIP inspection, where Camden received an Outstanding rating. It summarised progress under the previous plan, national and regional priorities, and key data on offending, reoffending and disproportionality. The Committee heard that existing priorities such as prevention, education and tackling disproportionality would continue, with new priorities focused on tackling domestic violence and abuse, supporting victims and improving transitions between youth and adult services.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- A Member raised concern about the equality aspects of the report and asked what had changed since last year to improve outcomes. They welcomed the forthcoming launch of the Race Equality and Justice Plan in July 2025, emphasising that it should involve a wide range of voices and avoid a tokenistic approach. Another Member asked about the proportion of children in the youth justice cohort with SEND. Officers said they could provide more detailed information on children with SEND in a future report. Of the 61 children referred to in the report, 14 had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), including one child with autism and seven with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Officers highlighted Camden's strong multi-agency approach, with co-located speech and language therapists (SALT) and educational psychologists, which had been recognised as good practice during inspection. They said the service was able to identify needs and apply effective strategies and they would share key components from the inspection report alongside this data in future reporting.
- A Member said that the performance summary in section 3 lacked sufficient comparative data, making it difficult to identify year-on-year trends or longer-term patterns. They asked for future reports to include annual comparisons, even if subject to fluctuation due to small cohort sizes. Referring to section 3.1, they questioned why 154 offences leading to 61 outcomes had been described as similar to the previous year's 113 offences and 49 outcomes, noting this was a clear increase. Officers agreed to include clearer comparative data and share further analysis with the Committee in future reporting. They explained that because the cohort was small, it was more appropriate to consider individual cases rather than percentage changes, as figures could fluctuate significantly. The increase partly reflected comparisons with pre-pandemic data, when recorded offences were lower nationally. Fluctuations also arose from variations in policing levels, offence types, and court outcomes. Camden's mid-year data indicated improvement on the previous year, and overall offending rates were expected to fall. Officers noted that national offences had risen post-pandemic and Camden's position was consistent with other areas. They said the service was not complacent but took assurance from the recent HMIP inspection, which found strong practice and positive outcomes.
- A Member welcomed the inclusion of tackling domestic violence and abuse as a new priority within the Youth Justice Plan but asked what this would mean in practice. They noted that the report contained little reference to gender beyond stating that four of the cohort were girls and said there were wider questions

about how this issue was being addressed in the youth justice context. Officers said the approach was still being developed but explained that learning from serious case reviews and individual deep dives had shown strong links between children's exposure to domestic violence and later offending. Work would focus on understanding children's lived experiences, strengthening interventions for those affected, and engaging young people, particularly boys, in exploring healthy relationships and trust. Officers said this would be done in partnership with other services working in the field to ensure a joined-up approach. The Member asked that links also be made with the Council's board on violence against women and girls to share learning and avoid duplication. Officers confirmed this was already under way and that the work would be aligned with the Council's victim strategy and violence against women and girls strategy to ensure consistency across both. The Member welcomed this update and described it as real progress since the last discussion. The Chair agreed that gender remained an important issue and said that the forthcoming victim work would help to highlight how women could be secondary victims where young men are involved in offending or violence.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

9. CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES' RESPONSE ON THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHILDREN SEND PROVISION IN CAMDEN

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families.

The Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families was unable to attend the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances, therefore officers presented the report. The Director of Education Commissioning Inclusion, accompanied by the Head of SEND and Inclusion, summarised the report which provided an update on the activity taken to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND following the recommendations from the final report of the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel. There had been significant activity to make improvements in the areas highlighted in the report and appendices, and further work was planned. The evidence and recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel were gratefully received and had informed forward plans.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- A Member asked about the High Needs Block (HNB) funding deficit and the rise in the number of children with SEND. They sought clarification on whether the increase reflected a genuine rise in need or changes in identification and diagnosis, and whether numbers were expected to continue rising. They also asked about other factors contributing to increased costs. Officers explained

that several factors had driven the rise in HNB spending. A key factor was the increased funding to mainstream schools, due to Camden's distinctive funding methodology which provided additional support before top-up funding is applied. This approach aimed to maintain children in mainstream education where appropriate, and there had been a significant rise in schools accessing this funding over the past four years. The growth in EHCPs had also increased top-up funding requirements for both mainstream and special schools. In addition, there had been a rise in low-incidence but high-cost independent and non-maintained placements, reflecting local sufficiency challenges faced nationally as well. Officers highlighted a HNB action plan with three strands: improving internal processes and panels to project costs more accurately; strengthening commissioning arrangements - particularly for post-16 education, by scrutinising providers' curriculum offers and ensuring better transitions into the community; and expanding local provision to reduce reliance on independent or out-of-borough placements. They added that the increase in SEND identification was not unique to Camden but reflected a regional and national trend, possibly linked to how the national SEND system operates. The forthcoming government white paper was expected to address some of these issues relating to rising demand.

- A Member expressed disappointment that the response to recommendation 10 did not include an update on the waiting time for a second autism assessment. They noted that when the report had been presented in July, a health colleague had confirmed that the waiting time identified in the report had increased from 96 weeks to 106 weeks. At that time, additional funding was expected to maintain the wait at around 106 weeks rather than reduce it, with hopes to eventually bring it back to 96 weeks. Officers confirmed that updates on therapies and neurodiversity pathways were monitored regularly and agreed to share the latest waiting time figures for second autism assessments with the Committee.

Action By: Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion

- A Member asked about the implementation timeframe for the forthcoming SEND commissioning strategy and plan, which were due to be considered at the next meeting in November. They asked whether implementation was expected in 2026 or 2027. Officers said that some details would be included in the November report, with fuller information to follow in February as part of the SEND Annual Plan. The plan was being developed to cover primary, secondary and post-16 provision, with some elements expected to be implemented from September 2026 and others from September 2027. They explained that expanding provision was complex and involved ensuring the right health partners, workforce capacity and expertise were in place. Additional provision for children with SEMH needs had already been increased in the primary sector this academic year, with further expansion expected before March of the following year. Continued increases in independent placements, home education and interim tuition highlighted the need to strengthen local provision to keep children in full-time education. Another Member commented that the increase in the number of children attending independent schools, as noted in the report, was concerning. They said this reflected challenges in meeting

needs locally and they hoped that the improvements in local provision would be implemented swiftly through the strategic plan.

- A Member asked for clarification on the term 'LISO'. Officers explained that the LISO was a DfE initiative introduced under the national Change Programme and was currently being prototyped in Camden. The programme focused on providing multidisciplinary support to mainstream schools, particularly those with high or increasing levels of SEND over a three-year trend. It aimed to strengthen transitions between primary and secondary schools by adopting similar approaches to those used by the Early Years Intervention Team in early years and primary settings. This work was linked to the School Sufficiency Programme and was being developed in partnership with Camden Learning to help schools adapt their curriculum and environments to support inclusion and improve outcomes for children with SEND. The prototype was funded until the end of the financial year, with the Change Programme expected to continue until the end of the academic year. By that time, there would be greater clarity on the direction set by the forthcoming government white paper. The LISO aimed to embed mobile, multidisciplinary support within schools to better meet children's needs and reduce the challenges that arise when pupils are unable to access mainstream education, which has contributed to increased demand for specialist provision.
- In response to a Member, officers agreed to share the All-Age Autism Strategy to be shared with the Committee.

Action By: Executive Director Children and Learning

- A Member commented that headteachers had expressed concern about the pressure on the workforce, particularly the number of teaching assistants leaving their roles. They noted that this was especially disheartening when staff who had received specialist training, such as from speech therapists, subsequently left. The Member said this added to teachers' workload and raised concerns about retention, stressing that sustaining teaching assistant support was essential to maintaining standards and achieving improvement in schools. Officers acknowledged these concerns and said that addressing SEND issues required a strong partnership between Camden Learning and the Council. They reported that joint work on this agenda was increasing, and that the cluster-based approach was already showing positive results. This work aimed to help schools share expertise and access specialist provision to reduce workforce pressures.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

10. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE NATIONAL REFORM: INITIAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding and the Director of Relational Practice.

The Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding summarised the report which provided an overview of the Children's Social Care National Reforms and detailed the programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children's Social Care in Camden.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following was discussed:

- A Member asked for an update on phase one of the programme, which began in June, and its progress against targets. Officers said progress was positive. Staff had self-selected into the new model over July and August, and teams went live in September following a detailed induction. A reflection session had since been held to gather feedback and identify improvements. A single assessment and plan had been introduced to prevent families from having to repeat their stories, and therapists would provide clinical supervision to multidisciplinary teams of social workers, family health workers, youth workers and Independent Domestic Violence Advocates within Camden Safety Net.
- A Member asked whether the programme would focus on a particular age group, such as younger children, or whether it would cover the full age range, including young people. Officers confirmed that the work covered all ages from birth to 25. They explained that this included the Children and Young People with Disability Service and the care-experienced young adults aged 18 to 25. The aim was to improve outcomes for children and young people at every stage. They added that, alongside this, parallel work was being developed within early help and youth early help services to create complementary early intervention and support pathways.
- A Member asked whether the programme included plans for mentoring initiatives to support young people, particularly those struggling at school or at home. Officers said that mentoring was an important element of the wider work. Camden already had a range of mentoring programmes within its integrated youth services, and there was significant potential to expand this further through local partnerships. Youth workers involved in the prototype were expected to offer mentoring support, building on approaches already used for children in care, who received support from independent visitors. Early intervention programmes within youth services also included a range of mentoring opportunities, and further information could be provided at a future meeting. A key aim of the programme was to enable practitioners to offer earlier and more flexible support by working closely with schools, voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners and neighbourhood-based services, helping to strengthen prevention and keep children within their families and communities wherever possible.
- A Member raised concern about domestic abuse, noting that rates in Camden were higher than in some other parts of London and asking how this issue was being addressed within the programme. They said that while the focus on sustaining children within their families was positive, this approach could present serious challenges in cases where mothers were victims of domestic abuse and might not wish to remain in a conventional family setting. The Member suggested that this issue should be given fuller consideration within the strategy. Officers agreed that the issue needed to be addressed carefully.

They explained that the DfE had been clear about the need for robust action when children and families were at risk. The lead child protection practitioner role had been introduced to strengthen this response by ensuring that experienced practitioners were involved at the earliest stage. When reports of domestic abuse were received, strategy meetings were held and these practitioners attended visits alongside social workers to provide experienced oversight from the outset and continuity throughout the case. Investment was being made in programmes to support survivors, to work safely with families where women wished to remain with partners, and to help children affected by domestic abuse. They noted that future updates to the prototype would include further information on how this work was being developed.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

11. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2025/26

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Children and Learning.

It was agreed that the Children's Social Care National Reform update reports scheduled for December and January would be combined into a single update, to be presented in January.

It was agreed that a shared workspace would be created for the Committee to access written responses to actions (e.g. SharePoint, MS Teams), which are currently circulated via email.

Action By: Executive Director Children and Learning

RESOLVED –

THAT the Committee note the report.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

The future meeting dates were noted.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR DECIDES TO CONSIDER AS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END