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Dear Cllr Conway and Cllr Gordon

Hackney Education Strategy 2025-2028

I am writing in response to your letter following the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission discussion on the Hackney Education Strategy for 2025-2028.

I am grateful to the Commission for their comments and suggestions for improvement on the Hackney Education Strategy and have addressed each of the specific recommendations in turn below.

Suggestion	Response
1. A key function of scrutiny is to ensure that the Council's policy and financial planning processes are aligned. The Commission would therefore welcome further clarity as to how the priorities set out in the HES 2025/2028 will be resourced, especially as a number of ambitions set out in the strategy relate to services supported through the General Fund (GF) rather than Direct Schools Grant (DSG) (e.g. school improvement, equalities, children's centres and community	<p>The action plans relating to all of the objectives feature comments on funding. Most priorities will be funded through the use of existing resources and some will actually realise a savings over time.</p> <p>The work to embed <i>Right Support, Right Time</i> graduated response will be funded through a corporate sponsored grant to enact the business case to provide support to settings. This will bring about savings in the long term.</p>

<p>engagement). Further details as to how these policy ambitions will be realised in the context of a current forecast financial deficit of £51m (to 2028/29) would be helpful.</p>	
<p>2. Given their insight into children's needs and how effectively these are met locally, parent/carers voice is integral to the design, delivery and review of high quality education services. Therefore, whilst the commitment within the HES 2025/2028 to actively listen to parents is to be welcomed, the Commission would suggest that Hackney Education should go further, and actively recognise parents and carers as 'key partners' in the delivery of high quality education provision. To support this, Hackney Education should ensure that there are sufficient and effective parent/carers engagement structures across the local education system so that their voice is fully integrated in service planning and delivery.</p>	<p>We will re-frame the opening sentence of the commitment to, "We recognise parents and carers as key partners and consider parental engagement in every aspect of our work."</p> <p>Work is in progress to develop sufficient and effective engagement structures across the local education system to ensure their voices are fully integrated in service planning and delivery. This begins with developing more effective partnerships with the VCS (aligning with the new VCS strategy), strengthening existing parent forums, developing parent forums where there are gaps and using these spaces for co design work, working with educational settings to strengthen their parent/ carer voice, developing and diversifying our borough wide team of parent governors, strengthening and developing advocacy, developing skills and practice in concerns and complaints, strengthening family to family support and embedding the parent commitment and STAR practice across services.</p>
<p>3. In an earlier review of the School Estates Strategy (November 2024), the Commission recommended the move to an areas based model of education planning, and therefore welcomes the development of this approach set out within the HES 2025/2028. Further clarity is needed however, as to how this new approach to education planning will be implemented, in particular, how it will be reconciled with longstanding challenges in the education system:</p> <p>a) How will a shared accountability system for school place planning be developed among local schools (as required by local area planning) when current systems are centred on individual school accountability through the Ofsted and the Regional Schools Director (for the Department of Education);</p> <p>b) Local Authority powers to direct all schools in support of school place planning remains uncertain until provisions within the Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill are confirmed. Until this time, the full engagement and participation of the</p>	<p>a) The shared accountability system for school organisation and place planning will coordinate activities between education settings, diocesan bodies and the Local Authority, supported by a new digital platform to guide our decision making. This new system will complement individual school accountability, which will still be a focus, by adding a layer of collaborative accountability for local place planning and school improvement.</p> <p>The Council's statutory duty to ensure sufficient provision, address inequalities, and promote inclusion will be supported by its area-based steering groups focused on local educational challenges. This will provide the framework to establish voluntary agreements and formal collaborations between schools and other stakeholders. The Local Authority (LA) already uses voluntary agreements between schools, dioceses, and MATs to coordinate some of its education functions. It will seek to extend these to address the further requirements of its Education Strategy.</p> <p>The Education Team is also creating an education settings information tool (digital platform) that will support schools to benchmark their performance against peers, share resources and best practices, and work together on collaborative improvement projects. This will enable the LA and its schools to</p>

<p>wider family of schools, including academies, in a collaborative area based approach to school place planning is therefore unclear.</p> <p>c) Further clarification is needed as to how local area based education planning will intersect with those schools which are operationally linked to other educational provision outside a local area (federated schools) or even out of borough (Multi-Academy Trusts).</p> <p>d) Moving to an area based approach to education planning will require significant changes to organisational and staff ways of working across, in particular how Hackney Education engages and works with educational settings, but also how it consults and involves other community stakeholders (e.g. parents, voluntary and community sector organisations). In this context, the Commission would welcome further assurance on Hackney Education's preparations to support this new area based model of education planning, and to ensure that there is a clear and consistent approach to engagement and involvement (i.e. to voluntary sector organisations).</p>	<p>effectively utilise local performance data, alongside quantitative and qualitative information, to allow for a comprehensive picture of each local area.</p> <p>This dual approach will ensure that individual schools remain accountable for their own performance while also being accountable to each other and the local area for collaborative activities on school organisation and place planning.</p> <p>The new system will include measures to incentivise schools to deliver on local outcomes, recognising and rewarding aspects that are important but difficult to measure i.e. equity and inclusion.</p> <p>Essentially, we will be enhancing our accountability structures, which currently emphasise centralised accountability, by establishing a system of Area Based Partnerships that will initiate and encourage collaboration and shared accountability at the local level.</p> <p>b) Local area education place planning intersects with federated schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) primarily through statutory collaboration on place planning and provision for vulnerable pupils, but we acknowledge the Council's direct control is somewhat 'curtailed' due to the autonomy of academies and, to a lesser extent, federations. This has therefore necessitated the development of a local area-based system of collaboration and partnership, especially when entities cross administrative boundaries.</p> <p>Currently the LA retains the statutory duty for managing the supply of school places in its area (sufficiency duty). It cannot force academies to expand or contract, so it recognises that the success of any collaboration relies heavily on their engagement and agreement. Thus, effective outcomes will rely less on the Council's ability to exercise its authority and more on its capacity to foster strategic collaboration, negotiation, and shared responsibility for all pupils in an area.</p> <p>The DfE is now clearly backing this 'place shaping' approach, and we anticipate the local authority role will be further strengthened in the new Education Bill.</p> <p>c) The Council recognises that federations and MAT trust boards that operate schools across a number of local authority areas could limit the influence of the individual schools/local governing boards and, by extension, the LA. Nevertheless, these organisations continue to bear substantial civic responsibilities toward each of their respective school communities.</p>
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This, in effect, makes the LA, Federations and MATs mutually reliant upon each other. The LA will need the cooperation of federations and MATs to manage local needs, and these organisations will benefit from being seen as "anchor institutions" and therefore fulfilling their civic responsibility to their communities. This engagement will be a reciprocal process, with well-defined communication channels and formal partnership agreements. This will ensure that the Council's area-based planning priorities are effectively coordinated with the overarching strategies of our federations and MATs

We must also consider the DfE's role, especially its regional teams. Regional Directors are legally responsible for supporting relationships between MATs and local authorities, ensuring effective coordination on matters such as pupil place planning, SEN, and school improvement. The DfE is already showing a stronger commitment to collaborative work among partners, which is expected to be reinforced with the upcoming legislative changes.

d) The Council recognises that in implementing this new area-based approach to education planning involves significant changes to organisational ways of working, service planning, staff roles, and stakeholder engagement. This is necessary to address critical challenges like falling pupil numbers, increased complex needs, and financial pressures.

Hackney Education has provided assurance through its detailed planning in the development of its 3 Year Strategic Plan, which focuses on collaboration, inclusion, and sustainability. The Plan outlines a vision for an "ambitious, anti-racist, and inclusive" education system, and has been developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders.

The approach requires staff to be present across various community-based settings and involves joint working across service boundaries. Its aim is to develop and embed collaborative approaches across the system with schools and settings, with a focus on using qualitative data to inform our planning and decision making.

The new corporate school organisation planning board will coordinate with key stakeholders to track population changes, assess their impact on school enrolment and finances, and implement school organisational changes in collaboration with other council departments.

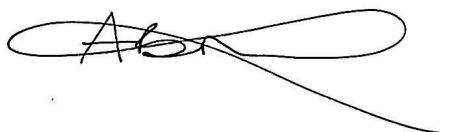
There will be an emphasis on training for staff and governors on partnership working inclusion,

	<p>supporting pupils with SEND, and equality duties, to ensure an inclusive mindset across the system.</p> <p>To ensure clear and consistent involvement with stakeholders, Hackney Education has undertaken extensive consultation and engagement activities with educational settings and our communities: We will continue this approach as we develop our plans and reinforce our commitment to listening to parents and carers, with efforts to ensure their views are heard through meaningful engagement and targeted support for those who need it most.</p> <p>The Education Strategic Plan emphasises the essential role of partnership with the voluntary sector in supporting the new mission and ensuring a wider range of support options are available.</p> <p>These preparatory steps and the outline of its future plans demonstrate the Council's commitment to move towards a cohesive, place-based system where all parts work together to ensure high-quality, sustainable, equitable and inclusive education for all children and young people in Hackney.</p>
<p>4. The Commission notes and welcomes the significant improvements in educational attainment which have been achieved in Hackney over the past 12 years set out in the strategy. Such progress however, has not been consistent among all pupil cohorts, and there remains significant and entrenched gaps in educational attainment between groups of local children in which inequities are recorded at each stage of child's education (GLD, KS2 and KS4) in Hackney. In this context, the Commission would welcome further assurance as to how the HES 2025/2028 will address the educational attainment gap in Hackney and support the development of affirmative strategies to address inequities in local educational attainment and outcomes for children and young people.</p>	<p>Hackney Education plans to address the inequity in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enhanced Accountability: Tightly monitoring and holding schools accountable for the accelerated progress of underachieving groups during termly school improvement visits. b) Best Practice Brokerage: Proactively sharing models from high-performing schools to ensure dissemination of evidence-based interventions across the borough. This involves the dissemination of evidence-based best practice models focusing on high-impact interventions for specific cohorts of under achieving pupils. c) JEDI Working Party: Implementing affirmative action plans developed by the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion working party to systematically dismantle systemic barriers and ensure all pupils receive the resources needed to achieve equity in outcomes. The party is tasked with identifying and dismantling systemic and structural barriers that prevent certain children from achieving their potential. <p>The JEDI Working Party is currently formulating a local action plan that ensures all school policies and practices are culturally</p>

	<p>responsive and inclusive, leading to targeted interventions and curriculum enhancements that ensure every child feels valued and affirmed.</p>
<p>5. Through the course of its work, the Commission has become increasingly concerned about inequities in local school attendance with varying under/over representations of certain pupil cohorts in different schools. For example, in its examination of school closures, the Commission noted significant variations in school populations serving children with SEND. Such variations in school populations are driven by inequities in school admission systems and of course through parental choice, which prioritises and maintains 'popular' schools.'</p>	<p>Addressing inequities in school attendance and pupil populations requires a multi-faceted approach involving reforms to school admissions, fostering fully inclusive school environments, and targeted support for underserved families. This includes the initiatives shared above, the development of HEALS inclusion strategy, and the further roll out of the graduated response framework, a cyclical, four-step process our schools will use to support students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND),</p> <p>We will be establishing a school admission working group to look at ways we can promote equity and inclusion in our admission arrangements, including the potential to introduce priority within schools oversubscription criteria for underserved children. Schools are legally allowed to give priority to 'disadvantaged' pupils (e.g., those eligible for Pupil Premium), but none of our schools currently do so. We will also consider ways for the LA to direct more resources towards schools serving underserved communities, and make sure targeted funding like the Pupil Premium is used more effectively to help those who need it most.</p> <p>We will also look at ways that we can better serve communities' education to help them progress at an equitable rate.</p>

I hope that this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Anntoinette Bramble

Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care