

Chair of Governors Update

5 February 2026

Dear Colleagues,

It was a pleasure to welcome governors from our Hackney Education settings who participated in last week's virtual forum. Your commitment, and that of our wider community of governors, to overseeing our schools, participating in training and contributing to education forums, clearly demonstrates your dedication. This vital engagement is key to sustaining and evolving our educational provision across Hackney, ensuring success, equity, and inclusion for every one of our children.

We opened the forum to Jason Marantz, our Director of Education & Inclusion, who presented [Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan](#). This plan outlines five key priorities aimed at developing a more robust and sustainable education system to better support all children across every community in Hackney.

The core of the forum discussion centred on the key priority: **'Equity for Children and Families.'** By reviewing local data, we again focused on the groups of children who, despite our school's best efforts, remain underserved. Governors were encouraged to act as "critical friends" by shifting their focus from *"How is the school doing?"* to *"Who is the school working for—and who is not succeeding?"* To help Governors gain a clearer understanding of the issues, a list of further questions (available [here](#)) was shared. We hope this will support your boards, in collaboration with school leaders to address our collective central mission to ensure a future education system that is more equitable for everyone. We sensed everyone's desire to continue this discussion and will be inviting our governors to a focus group where these equity matters will be further explored to capture your ideas on how we collectively address these challenges.

Another significant priority, **'Strength and Sustainability,'** was also brought to the forefront. While the presentation highlighted the financial aspect, this priority fundamentally marks a shift from a sole *'focus on pupils within your own school'* to a model of *'working in partnership with your nearby schools'*. This important transition has already been introduced to governors at last summer's conference and autumn forum. To further explore this development, we are organising a dedicated session for our Chairs of Governors and Chairs of Finance. Please reserve the date; direct invitations will be sent out to you next week.

Hackney Education Priority 3: Strength and Sustainability Workshop for Chairs of Governors and Chairs of Finance

Tuesday 10th March - 9:00-11:00 (Venue /virtual tbc)

As you look back and reflect on the presentations in the [slide deck](#) and notes below, we hope the content of our forums will further support and inspire the most crucial role you have as governors - that of supporting your leaders and all staff in ensuring our children continue to be safe, happy and ready to learn!

Sincerely,

Maggie Kalnins, Leader of Governance Services

Headline Summary

- **The Chair of Governors Update and forums are designed to share and discuss key development related to Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan priorities**

- Governors were urged to focus on underserved groups, specifically Black Caribbean pupils (BC), Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller (GRT), Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot pupils (TKTC) regarding equity.
- A dedicated session for Chairs of Governors and Chairs of Finance on 'Strength and Sustainability' is scheduled for Tuesday, March 10th.
- Boards must complete Schools Financial Value Standard (maintained schools) School Resource Management Self-Assessment Checklist (Academies) for submissions this term and ensure LA governor vacancies are filled promptly.

MATTERS FOR BOARD ACTION
Madalina Brockmann, Governance Services Manager

FOR BOARD ACTION THIS TERM Financial Self-Assessments (SFVS/SRMSAC): Maintained schools and academy trusts **must** complete and submit the **Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)** and the **School Resource Management Self-Assessment Checklist (SRMSAC)** **this term** to provide governing boards with assurance of good financial health.

FOR BOARD ACTION THIS TERM/YEAR Boards are advised to check that their **Local Authority (LA) governor vacancy** is appropriately filled to ensure full board capacity. If the current LA governor's term is approaching its end, please follow the formal appointment process detailed here: [Local Authority Governor Appointment Process](#). It is critical to note that the entire appointment process does involve layers of LA approval and can take several months, so early action is essential. For further consultation, please contact governorservices@hackney.gov.uk.

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY 3 YEARS Instrument of Government Review It is recommended that the governing board or trust **formally review its Instrument of Government (IoG) every three years**. This review is essential to ensure continued compliance with the latest Department for Education (DfE) regulations and to confirm its legal compliance, fitness for purpose and clarity of delegation / consistency with the Scheme of Delegation in supporting the strategic objectives and operational structure of the school or trust. Guidance on varying your IoG if you are a Hackney Local Authority maintained school and how to apply can be found [here](#).

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY 3 YEARS External Reviews of Governance (ERoG) The DfE recommends that trusts undertake an External Review of Governance (ERoG) every three years to reflect on board effectiveness and strengthen practice. ERoGs are expected to form an important part of evidencing strong leadership as national trust inspection arrangements develop.

Model Framework Agenda with Guidance for School Governing Boards Spring Term 2026

[This model framework](#) including agenda and guidance is provided to assist Chairs, Headteachers, Principals and Governance Professionals working in maintained schools or academies when compiling the agendas for Full Governing Boards (or equivalent) Spring 2026 meetings.

Also to Note:

Future Dates of Hackney Governors Forums for 2023/24 starting at 5.00pm:

- Tuesday 24th March 2026 (Online)
- Thursday 14th May - **Governors Annual Conference**
- Tuesday 23rd June 2026 - 17:00-18:30 (Virtual)

Full list of training for the Spring Term can be found at the bottom of this email.

We also remind you of our previous [updates and tools](#), our [Governors' Training Programme 25/26](#) and our [Governance Services offer](#), all designed to assist the crucial work you do.

We encourage you to share this update with board members and your wider networks—who can subscribe here to receive future communications—and would be grateful if you could also encourage your governance professional/clerk to sign up to our updates by clicking [here](#).

IMPORTANT: For any changes in Chairship, please can you instruct your governance professional / clerk to update governorservices@hackney.gov.uk immediately, to ensure the Local Authority can fulfill their statutory requirements and maintain essential communications.

In the meantime, for any governance questions, no matter how small, do reach out to us at governorservices@hackney.gov.uk

EDUCATION DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Director, Education & Inclusion - Jason Marantz

Hackney Education 3 Year Strategic Plan

Following December's Cabinet meeting, [Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan](#) has now been adopted.

It has been an incredible effort over many, many months. We have spent hours engaging, researching, consulting, drafting, redrafting and explaining. And now we have a clear forward for the next three years (at least!).

Below is a reminder of the 5 priorities.

- Priority 1: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and inclusion
- Priority 2: Alternative Learning Provision
- Priority 3: Strength and Sustainability
- Priority 4: Sustainable School Improvement
- Priority 5: Equity for Children and Families

City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) review

Hackney Education is working with the Mossbourne Federation to address the recommendations of the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Review. Thank you to the Chairs and Governors who have already responded to the local authority advice to review your internal safeguarding and complaints policies. Maintaining these policies is a critical local system responsibility, and your proactive engagement ensures our standards remain robust across the borough.

Hackney Schools Group Board

The Hackney Schools Group Board has completed its work in its current structure. We are now establishing a new advisory group. This group will focus on the implementation of the new Hackney Education three-year strategic plan. We plan to include school governors in this group and will soon provide details on how governors can apply for these seats.

Ickburgh Expansion (Sept 2027)

Hackney Council has approved a significant expansion for Ickburgh School, effective from January 2026, to address the increasing local demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision. This involves establishing a new 48-place split site at the former Baden Powell Primary School location (Ferron Road, E5 8DN). The initiative is designed to achieve two key goals: reducing the reliance on costly placements outside of the borough and providing dedicated, specialised facilities for students with severe autism and profound/multiple learning difficulties.

See [slides](#) 3 - 6

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 1: Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) & Inclusion
Lead Officer: Yvonne Wade, Head of SEND

The Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) & Inclusion priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the October 2025 forum.

LOCAL UPDATES

Hackney's Local Area SEND Inspection

Our [Ofsted and CQC report](#) following the [local area SEND inspection](#) in November 2025 has now been published.

See [slides](#) 5 - 6

NATIONAL UPDATES

£3bn Investment to End SEND Postcode Lottery (Policy Update/Investment)

The DfE announced a £3 billion investment package to improve consistency in SEND provision across England, with a focus on strengthening early intervention and mainstream inclusion.

For Boards: Monitor whether this national funding and reform translates into tangible improvements for pupils locally.

National SEND Training Programme

The government announced a £200 million national SEND training programme for every teacher and member of education staff.

Increased Access to Early SEND Support (Policy Update/Investment)

The DfE [confirmed](#) that early SEND support will expand through Best Start Family Hubs (rollout from April 2026) backed by a £500 million investment.

For Boards: Be aware of local implementation progress and how your school connects into these new early help pathways.

SEND Reform National Conversation

An informal national [conversation](#) is underway ahead of the 2026 Schools White Paper to gather insights on early identification and service integration.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY 2: Alternative Learning Provision
Lead Officer: Kate Cracknell

The Alternative Learning Provision priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This will be discussed at the June 2026 Forum.

RELEVANT LINKS

- Guidance on Restrictive Interventions in Schools New DfE [guidance](#) on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions will take effect from April 2026. The guidance provides clearer expectations on reporting, use of force, and specific support for staff working with pupils with SEND.

The Strength and Sustainability priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the October 2025 forum.

LOCAL UPDATES

Strength and Sustainability in Hackney's Schools - financial sustainability

- There are several key factors affecting financial sustainability in Hackney's schools including: rapid demographic change; a challenging national funding environment for London schools; rising building and energy costs, and ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining teaching and support staff.
- There is a range of support available to schools to assist with financial management, including: access to school financing schemes, financial management training for governors and headteachers, and guidance on budget setting, monitoring, and completion of the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS).
- Hackney also provides professional financial support and advice on strategic risk management. Targeted intervention and support programmes are also in place for schools experiencing financial pressure, including declining reserves or deficit budgets, with the aim of safeguarding educational standards.

Strategic Leadership Questions for Governors to Consider

- What is your determination to initiate and lead strategic change ?
- What is your capacity to manage risk?
- What is your capacity to make informed decisions on whether to form, join or grow a group of schools?
- What is your capacity to manage change with agility whilst ensuring academic ambition and excellence is not affected?
- Have you considered whether the future contribution of your school to the education community could be more effective and efficient in a different model?

Tools for Governors

Governors should ask to see 3-5 year financial projections and the assumptions made to cost them.

Assumptions you may want to review include:

- Projected pupil numbers including free school meal numbers and mobility (in-year transfers both in and out of the school).
- Current and projected pupil numbers for Nursery classes
- Likely Age Weighted Pupil Income and Pupil Premium Income (including for Looked After Children):
- Education, Health and Care Plan Funding and Sports Premium
- Staffing projections, including projections for pay rises etc.
- School staffing based on multi-year projections of curriculum needs.
- School improvement initiatives prioritised, costed and linked to the budget?
- Buildings maintenance plans and ICT maintenance plans
- Is the income predicted outside of the Dedicated School's Grant realistic? For example, income from wraparound care.

Questions Governors May Need to Ask

- How confident are you that pupil number projections are realistic? If there is uncertainty then boards should be given 3 scenarios: cautious, likely, and optimistic. (GLA projections include low, medium and high fertility rates).
- If either scenario indicates financial difficulties, is the school either developing a recovery plan or considering wider ranging options now?
- If the cautious budget indicates potential financial difficulties, what contingency plans, including partnership working with other schools, does the school have to overcome them?

- Are there any curriculum or education outcomes risks in the medium or long term that may need to be resolved by looking beyond our own school?
- How will current decisions impact medium-term and long-term budgets, plans and staffing structures?
- What can we put in place now to ensure long-term quality?

School Financial Value Statement (SFVS)

- The School Financial Value Statement DfE checklist can be found [here](#).
- The finance committee should examine each of the questions. This should be recorded in Governing Board Meeting Minutes and signed off by the Chair.

See [slides](#) 3 - 6

NATIONAL UPDATES

Managing School Rolls and Maintaining Educational Standards in London

A London Councils report '[Managing School Rolls and Maintaining Educational Standards in London](#)' was published in January 2026 and analyses the continued decline in demand for school places across London.

The report recommends that the government ensure sustainable school funding and provide local authorities with greater powers and flexibility to manage the consequences of declining pupil numbers, while maintaining educational standards.

Legal Changes to Employment Rights

The [Employment Rights Act](#) became law on 18 December 2025, covering a range of workforce measures including changes to pay, time off work, and dismissal. These changes will be implemented over a two-year period and establish the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB).

For Boards: Be alert to how future national recommendations may impact local staffing budgets and practices.

Maximising Value for Pupils (Guidance)

[New DfE guidance](#) sets out how schools must maximise value from resources, structured around four pillars: commercial, assets, workforce, and developing capability.

For Boards: The expectation shifts to whole-organisation financial responsibility; oversight must link spending decisions across these four pillars directly back to pupil outcomes.

RELEVANT LINKS

- Latest Pupil Attendance Statistics (Statistics/Report) New national [statistics](#) show rates below pre-2020 levels, with persistent absence high for disadvantaged and SEND pupils. For Boards: Oversight must move beyond headline figures to understand patterns by pupil vulnerability and ensure strategies are preventative.
- Rise in School-Based Nurseries Data: Recent [DfE survey data reveals](#) a 15% rise in the number of school-based nurseries (to 9,900 in 2025) alongside a 39% reduction in childminders, suggesting schools are taking a bigger role in early education, particularly in deprived areas.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 4: Sustainable School Improvement
Lead Officer: Lisa Williams, Head of School Improvement and Education Performance

The Sustainable School Improvement priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This will be discussed at a future forum.

NATIONAL UPDATES

Funding for National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) (Training/Policy)

Continued government funding is confirmed for NPQs.

For Boards: Ensure NPQ uptake is strategic, linking professional development directly to school improvement priorities (e.g., SEND, behaviour, leadership).

School Eligible for Erasmus+ Scheme in 2027 (Policy Update)

The UK has agreed to rejoin the [Erasmus+](#) exchange programme from the 2027-2028 academic year, likely replacing the Turing Scheme.

For Boards: Consider the strategic and equitable role of international activity within the curriculum.

Ofqual Launches On-screen Assessment Consultation (Consultation)

A 12-week public [consultation](#) is open on the potential for on-screen assessment in GCSEs, AS/A levels.

For Boards: Consider your school's readiness for digital assessment and the potential impact on equity/inclusion.

News in Brief: Falling Rolls (General Update)

Decreasing birth rates are leading to falling school rolls, now affecting schools beyond London. This is identified as a major threat to financial sustainability due to reduced funding.

For Boards: Strategic oversight of long-term financial planning and estate management is paramount.

Academy Specific

Ofsted Update - MAT Inspections

The government has confirmed plans to introduce routine inspection of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) as early as 2027, with the necessary legal changes introduced as an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Key principles include ensuring trusts are not disincentivised from taking on struggling schools and minimising inspection workload.

RELEVANT LINKS

- New DfE Guidance on Mobile Phone Policies DfE has published new [non-statutory guidance](#) on mobile phone use in schools, with Ofsted now placing greater emphasis on its implementation during inspections.
- Updated AI Safety Standards for Schools Strengthened [AI safety standards](#) for generative AI products were announced, alongside a £23 million investment to expand the use of AI/EdTech in over 1,000 schools and colleges.
- Exemptions from the Early Years Foundation Stage (Guidance) Updated [guidance](#) (January 2026) clarifies the three specific routes for EYFS exemptions, emphasising that safeguarding and welfare requirements remain unchanged.
- DfE Launches New GCSE Exam Results App DfE is launching a new GCSE exam results app this summer, following a regional pilot. While pupils will still get results in school, the app will modernise

access post-school, ease enrollment in post-16 destinations, and is expected to save schools an estimated £30 million annually in administrative costs.

- DfE AI guidance: [Generative AI in education](#); [school technology and digital plans](#) and [digital and technology standards self assessment](#).
- Further Decline in School Readiness, Survey Finds An annual survey found that 37% of reception children were not school ready in 2025 (up from 34% in 2024), highlighting struggles with toilet training, emotional regulation, and basic language skills.
- Ofsted [Annual Report\(Statistics/Report\)](#) 2024/25 The report highlights a significant 19% rise in children missing education compared to 2024, linking this to fragmented early SEND intervention. For Boards: Ensure strong, joined-up systems for early identification and support of vulnerable pupils.
- Ofsted [Inspection Data Report](#) (IDSR) (Statistics/Report) Updated IDSRs reflecting 2025 data are available for inspectors to inform lines of enquiry. For Boards: Use the report for internal review to anticipate and prepare for inspection conversations.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 5: Equity for Children & Families
Debra Robinson, Diversity and Inclusion Systems Leader
Damien Parrott, Senior Primary Leadership and Management Advisor

The Equity for Children & Families priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the January forum.

LOCAL UPDATES

Our Challenge for Governors

Governors are encouraged to act as "critical friends" to their school, by asking not just *"How is the school doing?"* but *"Who is the school working for—and who is not succeeding?"*

Equity - The Imperative to Act

- Black Caribbean students make up only 10% of the population but account for 38% of permanent exclusions.
- White British students make up 17% of the population but only 12% of exclusions.
- The Impact: A Black Caribbean student is 3.8 times more likely to be excluded than the average student.
- This statistical anomaly suggests systemic issues in how behaviour policies are applied or how needs are met for this specific group.

What does Data Tell us about Equity for Children and Families in Hackney?

- It's clear from our data that there are three under-served groups in Hackney's education settings:
 - Black Caribbean pupils (BC)
 - Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller (GRT)
 - Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot pupils (TKTC)
- Black Caribbean pupils start above the national average in early years but fall significantly below by Key Stage 4, a pathway unique among Hackney pupils. Turkish Kurdish pupils, often EAL

learners, have lower starting points but show gradual improvement, while Gypsy Roma and Traveler pupils are the lowest achieving group across all measures, a significant national and local challenge.

- Black Caribbean pupils, including those of mixed White and Black Caribbean background, are significantly overrepresented in SEN classification, with their primary need most often identified as SEM (social, emotional, and mental health), which relates closely to behavior management and subsequent outcomes like exclusions.
- There is a significant overrepresentation in Speech, Language and Communication need identified for the Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot pupils, suggesting a potential misdiagnosis of English as an Additional Language (EAL) as a special need, possibly linked to reduced support for EAL since 2012.
- Poor attendance, particularly persistent absenteeism, is a major issue for Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveler pupils, directly impacting their academic outcomes.
- Hackney Education is starting to introduce a conversation about the three under-served groups into the School Improvement Programme (SIP) reports for primary schools, with a table featuring pupil numbers rather than percentages to facilitate dialogue between heads and SIPs. Governors are encouraged to pick up on this conversation when reviewing SIP reports.

Questions for Governors to Consider

Governors were asked to consider a range of questions, on the following themes:

- Data & Outcomes for Children
- Training in Schools
- School Curriculum
- Parental Engagement
- Reviewing School Policy
- Diversity of School Staff

The full set of questions can be found [here](#).

The governors services team will be arranging a virtual session for school governors to continue this conversation in March. In this session we will discuss how we can all work together to achieve a more equitable education system for Hackney's children. Invitations will be sent within the next few weeks.

See [slides](#) 7 - 27

NATIONAL UPDATES

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (Policy Update)

A new [strategy](#) places schools at the centre of prevention, with secondary schools expected to have a strong offer on healthy relationships by the end of this Parliament (by 2029). This is supported by an investment including £3 million for teacher training and £5 million for pilot programmes.

For Boards: Strategic oversight is required to ensure the secondary school curriculum develops a robust, compliant offer on healthy relationships by the 2029 deadline, aligning with the new national strategy. Boards must monitor the effective utilisation of funding for teacher training and pilot programmes to build staff capacity and embed prevention measures within wider safeguarding and wellbeing duties.

New Child Poverty Strategy (Policy Update)

The government published [Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty](#) (Dec 2025 update), linking child poverty to attendance, attainment, and demand for pastoral support.

For Boards: Ensure school systems are responsive to disadvantage and monitor related data (attendance, exclusions, wellbeing).

News in Brief: Digital Transformation(General Update)

Digital technology and AI are driving change, but uneven progress risks exacerbating inequality.

For Boards: Prioritise an evidence-led approach to piloting and scaling digital tools that improve pupil outcomes.

Parental Complaints Guidance

New guidance ([School guide to parent complaints](#) and [Parent guide to school complaints](#)) co-developed with DfE and Ofsted, aims to address the sharp rise in complaints by promoting calmer dialogue and setting out a five-step process for parents..

For Boards: While this attention to rising complaint volume is welcomed, gaps remain, particularly regarding different legislative frameworks, the scale of unreasonable parent behavior, and the need for clear enforcement powers, especially in relation to AI-generated complaints.

RELEVANT LINKS

- Updates Sex and Relationships Guidance (Guidance) Updated [guidance](#) reaffirms statutory expectations for RSE, focusing on age-appropriate, inclusive education and consistent curriculum delivery.
- DfE Survey Shows Rise in Pupil Satisfaction (Statistics/Report) [Analysis](#) of the 2024-2025 academic year covers pupils' sense of belonging, safety, and motivation. For Boards: Use this evidence to test if school systems are creating a safe, supportive learning environment.

HIGHLIGHT OF TRAINING GOVERNORS - HEADLINES

Hackney Education Governors Forums

- Hackney Governors Forum: Tuesday, 24th March 2026, 5:00pm-7:00pm (online)
- Hackney Education FREE ONLINE GOVERNOR TRAINING: Access our [Hackney Governor Training Padlet](#) to book and for live offers, webinars, and toolkits.

Spring Offer

- [Hackney Governor Induction and Refresher](#): Tuesday 10th March 5:00-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of School Finance: Budgeting and the Governance of Sustainability \(Advanced\)](#): Tuesday, 10th February, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of Complaints and Stakeholder Engagement \(Advanced\): Wednesday, 25th February](#), 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of Curriculum, Achievement and Teaching: Tuesday](#), 3rd March, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of SEND \(Special Educational Needs and Disabilities\)](#): Thursday, 5th March, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of Inclusion - through the lens of managing behaviour and building relationships\(Advanced: Suspension and Exclusion Panels\)](#): Tuesday, 17th March, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of Safeguarding \(mandatory by law, every 2 years\)](#): Wednesday, 25th March, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [Strategic Leadership of Careers](#): Thursday, 19th March, 5:00pm-6:30pm
- [National School Governors' Awareness Day 2026](#) (Training/Event) A dynamic online event on 12 February 2026
- NGA [Governance Leadership Forum: Making Financial Efficiencies](#) – 10 February, 4.30pm to 6pm
- NGA [Chairs Forum](#) – 4 March, 4pm to 5.30pm
- **National School Governors' Awareness Day 2026 (Training/Event)** A dynamic online event on **12 February 2026** with a day-long programme of free webinars to gain practical insights and explore key topics shaping effective governance. [Full programme and registration](#).