

Chair of Governors Update

3rd July 2025

Dear Colleagues,

It was a pleasure, as always, to welcome such a diverse group of governors to our final forum of the year last week!

During the forum, we all participated in discussions about our Sustainable Schools Strategy and shared best practices for how governing boards assess Financial Sustainability and the Management of Risk. Jason Marantz also elaborated on the development of Hackney Education's three-year strategic plan, emphasising our commitment to anti-racism and collaborating with parents and carers. These principles are fundamental to our priorities and our efforts to ensure all Hackney pupils achieve their full potential, regardless of their background. For those who couldn't attend, we encourage you to watch the presentations using these links: [video](#) and [slide deck](#).

Reflecting on our forums this year, we debated issues and topics vital to our schools and deeply important to us and our local education system. We examined pupil achievements and student support. We focused on the anticipated Ofsted changes and various subjects including Behaviour, Wellbeing, Safeguarding, and Managing Complex Complaints. We also prioritised equity, promoting cultural diversity within our governing board, and strengthening relationships with parents.

Throughout the year, we particularly acknowledged Hackney's significant progress in education, with remarkable advancements over the past two decades centered on school improvement. We also recognised that today's leaders and governors must adapt to evolving, complex, and unprecedented challenges, such as declining student numbers, reduced funding, persistent inequality, children's well-being issues, poverty, and parents' trust and engagement with our schools. This is why our primary focus this year has been on Hackney's broader education strategy, specifically the strategic development of a robust and financially sustainable education system.

Addressing these current challenges requires a shift towards more collaborative and partnership-based actions, fostering sustainable and inclusive growth for everyone. This imperative is highlighted by new insights from education, health, social care, and the third sector. Our ultimate success hinges on combining our resources and collaborating in both established and innovative ways to continuously enhance our local education system.

Looking ahead to next year, we will maintain a strong focus on developing an even stronger education system. Inspired by the proverb "Necessity is the mother of invention," we will confront challenges, recognise needs, and strive to find creative solutions that ensure continued success, excellence, equity, and inclusivity for all.

In the final week of term, our school leaders, staff, and children will be anticipating a well-deserved break. We also hope our governors enjoy a period of rest from their "job" during the summer holidays. You play a crucial role in shaping our future education system, and while your dedication may often go unacknowledged, your contributions are essential for a thriving educational environment!

Sincerely,
Maggie Kalnins, Leader of Governance Services

The Content:

This update provides a summary of headlines from our Extended forum for Governors - which took place virtually from 5pm to 6.30pm on Thursday 26th June. The event focused on the following key areas:

- **Updates from the Director of Education and Inclusion**
- **Sustainable Schools Strategy**
- **Financial Sustainability and Management of Risk Across our Schools**
- **Admission of 'Hard to Place' Pupils (Fair Access Protocol)**
- (The [slide deck](#) and [video](#) from last week's event)

We also remind you of our previous [updates and tools](#), 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 be included in our future communications.

EDUCATION DIRECTOR'S UPDATE Director, Hackney Education - Jason Marantz

Ofsted

- Schools will be aware that significant reform is on the horizon with regards to Ofsted, with changes clearly signposted by recent correspondence between the Secretary of State for Education and the Ofsted Chief Inspector. While we anticipate these shifts, it's crucial to remember that within the current inspection system, which Hackney schools have navigated through many cycles, there is no longer an overall grade awarded. Nevertheless, we can proudly say that 100% of Hackney schools have a good or outstanding Ofsted inspection.

Child Q IOPC Investigation

- Today, we learned of the outcome of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) investigation into three Metropolitan police officers involved in the strip search of a 15-year-old black girl at a school in Hackney 2020. The IOPC panel found that the search was unnecessary, inappropriate, and disproportionate. It was carried out without authorization from a more senior officer, without an appropriate adult present, and a proper record was not made afterwards. It also raises serious questions around training processes and accountability within the police and the need to strengthen national legislation on strip searching. The IOPC found as part of their review of the evidence that neither age nor race were considered by them to be a factor in the way that child Q was treated. Jason acknowledged that many in the community would find this upsetting and emphasized the need to be mindful of this, highlighting the issue of adultification. He reassured attendees that Hackney continues to support Child Q and the family and offered support to school communities affected by this. The wellbeing of the children and staff in our schools is paramount. If there is anything that we can do support you please reach out directly to us, Anton Francic, Interim Assistant Director for School Performance and Improvement (anton.francic@hackney.gov.uk) and Calvin Henry, Interim Principal Primary Adviser (calvin.henry@hackney.gov.uk).

Hackney Three Year Strategic Plan

- Jason Marantz outlined Hackney Education's three-year strategic plan. The draft vision emphasizes sustaining and evolving the current offer to cater for everyone and better meet the needs of underserved communities.

- Two key commitments that will underpin all our priorities and objectives will be: committing to being 1) anti racist and 2) working in partnership with parents and carers, ensuring that all pupils in Hackney reach their potential no matter their background.
- The five priorities are: *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and inclusion; Additional and Alternative Learning Provision; Strength and Sustainability; Sustainable School Improvement; Supporting Underserved Children and Families.*
- A consultation on the strategic plan will launch from 7 July to 22 September 2025. We seek your input in developing the strategic plan and welcome feedback on the vision, commitments and priorities that have been developed. Visit the consultation website [here](#) from 7th July.

See [slides](#) 3 - 15 ([Video](#) section **30:18 - 49:05**)

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Terry Bryan - Assistant Director, School Estate Strategy

Mission

An 'Education Strategy' that aims for a borough-wide approach, with every setting working together to ensure a 3 -19 flexible education system. One that is financially sustainable, maintaining ambition for our children and adapting to population changes. One that remains inclusive to support our underserved communities.

- **Enabling our people** - governors, school leaders, and local officers to focus on children, establishing collective solutions and continuing to improve the lives of all, particularly our most underserved communities.
- **Pursuing an asset-based approach** - focuses on identifying and utilising the strengths, resources, and capabilities of our education settings to best serve the needs of our localised communities of children & young people.
- **Promoting collaboration and partnerships** - enabling our education system to remain strong and financially sustainable for years to come.

Why Now?

- **Area Based Partnerships** form part of the wider Hackney Education Strategy for a resilient and financially sustainable education system.

- **Declining pupil numbers** and resulting budget deficits
- **Significant cost pressures** and reduced government funding
- **Addressing community inequalities** (46% of pupils are disadvantaged in Hackney)
- **Increasing demand** for SEND and social care services
- **Disproportionate disadvantage** for specific communities (Black Caribbean, Turkish Kurdish, Irish Traveller, and Charedi Orthodox Jewish)
- **The risks** to maintaining Hackney's high-quality education

Breakout Discussion

Attendees were split into breakout groups to discuss some questions about Area Based Partnerships. The questions and a summary of the response are produced below. A more detailed version of the responses can be found [here](#).

1. How might Area-Based Partnerships improve efficiency/sustainability and make better use of our finite resources?

- Financial & Operational Synergy: Shared financial expertise and consolidated contracts.
- Non-Teaching Staff Sharing: Viable for office/premises roles without compromising standards.
- Targeted Resource Utilisation: Addresses specific resource needs, though less applicable for highly specialized settings.

2. How might Area-Based Partnerships enable and enhance our work with our communities?

- Community Engagement & Support: Identifying and assisting disproportionately affected groups.
- Leveraging Existing Structures: Utilising Children's Centres for shared practices and commercial facility lettings.
- Sustaining Charitable Endeavors: Developing strategies to ensure the continuation of vital community initiatives.

3. How might Area-Based Partnerships be effective in addressing current inequalities in the education system?

- Resource & Expertise Pooling: Sharing SEN organisation, specialised courses, and teaching materials.
- Enhanced Pupil Opportunities: Creating shared cohorts for interventions and extracurricular activities.
- Collaborative Problem Solving: Addressing challenges like falling rolls through genuine partnership and local knowledge.

4. What are the key conditions to facilitate establishments of Area-Based Partnerships?

- Clear Vision & Collaboration: Defined goals from Hackney Education, promoting cooperation over competition.
- Child-Centric Focus: Prioritising the entire educational journey of each child.
- Strategic Resource Matching: Identifying and leveraging school strengths and addressing weaknesses across diverse school cultures.

5. What barriers might we face in establishing these Area-Based Partnerships and how could they be addressed?

- Demographic Pressures: Overcoming challenges of falling pupil numbers and school closures/mergers.

- Preserving School Identity: Balancing necessary changes with maintaining each school's unique character.
- Stakeholder Acceptance: Addressing concerns of parents and staff accustomed to individual school identities.

See [slides](#) 16 - 22 ([Video](#) section **2:36 - 29:28**)

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK ACROSS OUR SCHOOLS

Suhal Kadir - Schools Finance Manager

Financial Sustainability

- Schools are currently navigating significant financial challenges, stemming from falling pupil numbers, escalating Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) requirements, and the lingering impacts of the pandemic. These pressures are leading to a substantial depletion of school reserve balances, with a reported £13 million loss across Hackney schools over the past six years. To counter potential deficits, robust financial planning is essential, including engaging with formal processes like licensed deficit agreements and developing comprehensive recovery plans.

Key messages shared include:

- **Financial Planning and Strategy:** Emphasizing the importance of understanding budget comparisons (25/26 vs. 24/25), projecting and managing deficits, and developing robust three-year budget strategies.
- **Pay Awards:** Noting recent pay increases for teachers (4% with schools meeting 1%) and support staff (3.2%) and their implications for school budgets.
- **Schools Financial Values Statement (SFVS):** Explaining this self-assessment tool for financial forecasting and risk management assurance.
- **Key Considerations:** A series of prompts for schools to assess their financial health, including realistic projections, integrated curriculum and financial planning, adequate budget setting time, regular staffing structure reviews, independent advice for headteacher pay, benchmarking, and asset maintenance.
- **Statutory Responsibilities of Governing Boards:** Outlining duties such as budget setting, strategic alignment, value for money, budget monitoring (at least 6 times a year), financial oversight, SFVS compliance, and transparency.

- **Best Practice Resources:** Providing links to relevant Hackney Education and Gov.uk guidance, training, and support for schools facing financial difficulties.

Full details see [slides](#) 24 - 29 ([Video](#) section 51:44 - 1:08:25) and [this document](#)

ADMISSION OF 'HARD TO PLACE' PUPILS (FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL)

Karen Powell Thomson - Consultant: Inclusion and Alternative Provision/SEND

What is the Fair Access Protocol?

- The Fair Access Protocol is a system coordinated by the local authority to make sure that children who are hard to place—such as those who have been excluded, are new to the area without a school place, or face other significant challenges—are given quick and appropriate access to education.
- It ensures that:
 - No school is unfairly asked to take more than its share of vulnerable pupils.
 - All schools play a role in supporting inclusion.
 - Pupils without a school place are not left without education for long.
- The process is agreed with local schools and follows government guidance, but can be adapted to fit local needs.

Reasons for Change

1. **Pupil needs:** Addressing the increasing complexing of pupil needs in schools and the capacity to support these needs
2. **Schools and alternative provision settings:** These stretched and have a growing need for more nuanced placements and pathways (HEALs)
3. **Fairness:** Some schools and families feel that the current process is not fair. An update will build trust and make placements more collaborative and transparent.
4. **National guidance is changing:** New Government and OFSTED expectations related to inclusion means that Hackney needs to up date its Fair access placement processes
5. **Pupil outcomes and safeguarding:** A revised process will aim to improved the timeliness of supported placements and improve children's' chances of success (Particularly for a growing number of children out of education)
6. **Promote system wide Inclusion:** FAP can and should be a lever for the fair distribution of challenging cases. This requires supported placements.
7. **Local needs and demographics are changing:** Hackney's population and distribution of schools places continues to change. The FAP needs to take this into consideration
8. **System efficiency in terms of monitoring and evaluation of children's and families' needs in schools:** A new process will include additional ways to track progress and problems early

Key Changes

1. **A revised panel structure** with increased representation from Headteachers to ensure fairness and the inclusion of more nuanced pathways for children with complex needs placed.
2. **New Terms of reference** for the Fair access meetings which will provide a joint LA and Headteacher leadership and decision making structure.
3. **A Part B - Fair Access process** which will be named the Hackney Inclusion panel and will provide support options to support children and schools places by the Fair access process.
4. **Additional support pathways** sourced and shaped by a new Hackney alternative Education service for schools receiving complex fair access placements (2026)
5. **Clarification of decision making criteria** and appeals processes to ensure a more balanced distribution of pupils across Hackney schools. Supported by the introduction of the principle of rotation.
6. **Improved timelines** for supported placements.
7. **Improved and revised data sharing** to ensure all schools are aware of a fairer distribution of Hackney children across schools.
8. **Improved monitoring, evaluation and partnership working** to ensure gaps and issues in the system are identified and responded to earlier.

Timelines for Engagement with all Stakeholders Including Governors

Date	Process
May- July 2025	LA review of the Fair access placement process
July 2025	Draft Fair access protocol and policy with key proposed changes distributed to schools
September - October half term 2025	Draft Fair Access protocol and policy pilot Consultation with all Headteachers.
November - January 2025	Consultation feedback document and final draft to be produced and shared with schools for agreement
January 2026	Implementation of final revised Fair Access Protocol and policy including new Hackney LA led Inclusion panel.

If you have any further questions about the Fair Access Protocol, please contact Karen Powell Thomson (Consultant for Inclusion and Alternative Provision/SEND) karen.thomson@hackney.gov.uk or David Court (Head of School Organisation and Commissioning) david.court@hackney.gov.uk

See [slides](#) 30 - 37 ([Video](#) section 1:08:58 - 1:15:51)

HIGHLIGHT OF TRAINING & GUIDANCE FOR GOVERNORS - HEADLINES

The Department for Education (DfE) has published and updated several key documents:

- [Maintained schools governance guide published 26 June 2025](#)

Notable Changes Include:

- A greater emphasis on the requirement for governing bodies to demonstrate the **active promotion of fundamental British values** (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs).
- All board members have a basic understanding of the school's legal requirements on **procurement as well as on accountability and spending**.
- **School funding information** – reference to the teachers' pension employer contribution grant, core schools budget grant, and the national insurance contributions grant;.
- A requirement for the chair to sign off the school's digital reporting form return detailing how the school has used its **PE and sport premium allocation**,
- Update to the legal basis for keeping **admission and attendance** registers
- Suggested guidance to support the promotion of **good behaviour of pupils**, including the use of mobile phones and searching, screening and confiscation in schools.
- A greater emphasis on the requirement for the **school premises and facilities** to be kept up to a standard where, as much as is reasonably possible, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are guaranteed.
- A new section on **nutrition** under pupil mental health and wellbeing to cover the board's role in school food. In line with the DfE's school food guidance for governors, schools are expected to have a policy on school food.
- [Academy Trust Handbook \(effective from September 2025\)](#).
- [Financial support and oversight for academy trusts published 25 June 2025](#)
- [Financial support and oversight for academy trusts published 25 June 2025](#)

Notable changes include:

- **Environmental sustainability** – guidance on sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education refers to DfE's strategy which sets an expectation for all education settings to have nominated a sustainability lead and a climate action plan by 2025.
- **Digital and technology standards** – trusts should now be working towards meeting the six core digital and technology standards by 2030 - broadband internet, network switching, wireless network, cyber security, filtering and monitoring, and digital leadership and governance.
- **Managing Public Money (MPM)** – further guidance on the accounting officer's duties and the underlying principles of MPM to better support trusts to secure high standards of financial probity
- **Executive pay** – there is a new requirement for trusts to have an agreed pay policy that sets out the process for determining executive pay. This must ensure that the approach to, and levels of, executive pay and benefits are transparent, proportionate and defensible
- **Cyber Ransomware** – the handbook confirms that trusts must not pay any cyber ransom demands
- **Intervention powers** – educational performance has been removed from the examples provided in 6.17 as an area in which a Notice to Improve (NtI) may be issued on governance grounds
- **Recovery of funds** – the DfE has added a section on when it may recover funds. Circumstances include where there is evidence of irregular payments or fraud.

- **Related party transactions** – the Academy Trust Handbook links to new guidance on managing conflicts of interest and related party transactions. [Financial Support and Oversight for Academy Trusts](#)

RELEVANT LINKS

Headline Notes:

1. Promoting Equalities: with focus on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

- [Mohamed Abdallah: To Belong Is Not Enough: Why We Must Move Towards Mattering](#)
- [Mohamed Abdallah: The Mattering Model: What if Belonging Is Only 50% of the Answer?](#)
- [Interactive map revealing access to opportunity by constituency... | The Sutton Trust](#)
- [One in four pupils in England 'disengage' when they move to secondary, report finds](#)

2. Enabling achievement

- [Nuffield Foundation: A generation at risk - Rebalancing education in the post-pandemic era](#)
- [Schools Week: 6 proposals from academy bosses to improve Ofsted reforms](#)
- [ImpactEd: Research & Resources on Education Evaluation & Strategy](#)
- [Sure Start centres generated £2 of financial benefits for every £1 spent, study finds](#)
- [Gatsby Benchmarks Explained](#)

3. Assuring provision for Pupils with SEND

- [TES: Why every mainstream school needs a special-school partner](#)

4. Sustainable school systems

- [Schools Week: School budgets much worse than we thought, say leaders](#)
- [TES: Pupil numbers - The regional forecasts schools need to know](#)
- [Schools Week: Surge in school cuts 'threatening Labour's opportunity mission'](#)
- [Schools Week: Retention - What will it take to make more schools 'sticky'?](#)
- [IPPR: A system that empowers - The future of professional development](#)
- [Gov.UK External reviews of governance: guide for schools and academy trusts](#)
- [ImpactEd Group When Pupils Disengage from School](#)

5. Safeguarding, wellbeing and pastoral provision

- [Schools Week: Lost learning crisis: 10 solutions to keep kids in class](#)
- [NFER: Why a one-size-fits-all approach to attendance isn't the way forward](#)