

Jennette Arnold OBE AM, Chair of the Education Panel



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

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Dear Sadiq,

Overview of schools in London and inequality of outcomes for children across London

I am writing to you on behalf of the London Assembly Education Panel to share findings from our recent investigation into school places and the impact of inequality and disadvantage on educational attainment. In this letter we call upon you to support and encourage the development of a more inclusive education system that is responsive to the changing demands for school places and addresses the inequality in outcomes and attainment for all pupils. The Panel has identified several recommendations.

Growth in the demand for school places in London

As you are aware, there has been a rapid growth in the number of children living in the city over the last decade.¹ Consequently, demand for school places in London has risen significantly and at a faster rate than in any other region of the country². The Panel heard from Sara Williams, Chair of London Council's Pan London Admissions Boards, that between 2011/12 and 2018/19, the school population went up by nearly 14 per cent. According to London Councils, current projections highlight a shortfall of 45,355 places across primary and secondary schools in London until 2022/23, with the majority of places required at secondary level.³

There has also been a substantial rise in the demand for places for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).⁴ The number of individuals with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), requiring specialist provision to meet their needs, has risen by 29 per cent since 2010 in London.⁵

¹ Mayor of London, [Annual Education Report](#), February 2017

² London Councils, [Do the maths 2018](#), November 2018.

³ Ibid

⁴ London Assembly, [Together: Transforming the lives of children and young people with special education needs and disabilities in London](#), July 2018

⁵ London Councils, [Do the Maths 2018](#)

While local authorities have plans to meet the pressures on school places, they need more flexibility in how they plan for school places and respond to growing demand. The majority of these new places will be met by academies and free schools. The rest will be provided by expanding existing schools. But this provides challenges including, site location constraints in a crowded capital; the insufficiency of basic need funding to build a new school without government funding; and issues with some Academies refusing to expand.⁶

The Panel heard that while London needs new provision to cope with rising demand in many areas, some local authorities in the capital are now also experiencing an issue with surplus places, due to falling demand and oversupply of free schools in some areas. Schools with many empty spaces are likely to face financial struggles⁷. Given the uncertainty around forecasting demand at present, with the number of reception applications dropping in many areas of London and the ONS population projections potentially overestimating the number of school pupils in the coming years, it is important to ensure that the right number of school places are being planned for in the right areas.⁸ Local authorities need to have flexibility in being able to match the demand for school places in their community appropriately.

In terms of the Mayor helping to support local authorities to better plan school places and ensure that the right number of school places are provided, the Panel calls on the Mayor to lobby Department for Education to allow local authorities more flexibility in planning for school places and more control over decision making in where schools are opened.⁹

Recommendation one: The Mayor should lobby the Department for Education (DfE) to enable local authorities to better plan for school demand, by March 2020.

Financial implication of increased demand

London Councils has stated that the capital will need an estimated additional £1 billion between 2019/20 and 2022/23 to meet increased demand for mainstream places.¹⁰ This would be funded “either through the basic need grant itself or through the creation of new free schools in areas of demand”.¹¹

In the August Spending Review, the Prime Minister announced a £14.4 billion investment into primary and secondary education nationally between now and 2022-23.^{12 13} This included £66 million for early years.¹⁴ However, this is not an extra £14 billion per year for schools but cumulative additional funding that will be spent between 2020-21 and 2022-23.¹⁵ The Education Policy Institute states that the increase totals £7.1 billion per year by 2023. Only a billion of this will be for the growth in pupil numbers nationally.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ London Assembly, Education Panel, [Overview of schools in London and inequality in outcomes for children across London](#), September 2019, page 6

⁸ London Councils, [Do the Maths 2018](#)

⁹ The GLA Conservative members do not believe that local authorities should be given more control over decision making in where schools are opened, and strongly favour free schools, their independence from local authority control, and the benefits and opportunities they offer to their pupils.

¹⁰ London Councils, [Do the Maths 2017 London's school places challenge](#), 2017

¹¹ London Councils, [Do the Maths 2017 London's school places challenge](#), 2017

¹² DfE, [Prime Minister boosts schools with £14 billion package](#), 30 August 2019

¹³ TES, [PM announces 'giant £14 billion' school funding boost](#), 30 August 2019

¹⁴ TES, [Government gives extra £66m to early years](#), 4 September 2019

¹⁵ Schools Week, [Does the government's school funding pledge actually stack up?](#) 2 September 2019

On 11 October 2019, DfE announced funding allocations to schools.¹⁶ Funding to London's boroughs is to increase by approximately 3.2 per cent from 2020-21, with provisional funding per pupil at £5,519. The Panel notes that the funding allocations give the biggest increase to schools that have been historically underfunded. However, as highlighted above, the pressures on London schools in providing places as well as adequate services for students is expected to increase.

Special educational needs

Given London's challenges in SEND provision, there is an upward pressure on funding to deliver support for students with SEND. The costs of independent placements are often covered by local authorities, thus placing extra pressures on the budgets for high needs pupils in London.¹⁷

The number of individuals with education health and care plans (EHCPs), requiring specialist provision to meet their needs, has risen by 29 per cent since 2010 in London. According to Sara Williams, possibly every London borough, bar one or two, is overspending on its high needs block of that dedicated schools grant. This echoes findings from the London Councils and the Association of London Directors of Children's Services. In 2016-17, spend on high needs was greater than the amount allocated through the High Needs Block in 26 out of 33 boroughs, with an aggregate shortfall among overspending boroughs of £100 million, which is a shortfall of 13 per cent.

In the Panel's report on SEND provision in London, there were eleven recommendations to boost the availability of high-quality play spaces for children and young people with SEND.¹⁸ A year on from our report and the evidence highlights that SEND provision for children in London is still a cause for concern.

Increasing the demand for needs of students

The Panel's guests highlighted concerns around mental health issues among young people, however, schools are not well-resourced to tackle the issue.¹⁹ The Panel heard from guests that schools have limited ability to hire additional members of staff outside of the teaching realm: for example, school counsellors and the services that might be bought from charities that provide counselling and mental health support. The ability of schools to commission these additional services is further reduced by reductions in funding.

Knife crime was also highlighted as a concern for young people. Disadvantaged children or children excluded from school, are vulnerable targets of criminal exploitation. The Panel recognises that the Violence Reduction Unit is investing £4.7 million to tackle school exclusions and support vulnerable young Londoners. However, the Panel is concerned that London knife crime continues to rise and is at its highest level for eleven years. Our report *Preventing Secondary School Exclusions* found that excluded children are four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and 10 times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems.²⁰

¹⁶ Department for Education, [School funding allocations 2020-21](#), October 2019

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ London Assembly, Education Panel, [Overview of schools in London and inequality in outcomes for children across London](#), September 2019, page 6

²⁰ London Assembly, [Preventing School Exclusions](#), April 2019

Real-term funding cuts in schools have made it harder to support children in need, with fewer services and staff available. The previous government pledged to make children's mental health a priority with additional funding, and new compulsory health education that is intended to teach children how to look after their mental wellbeing. The evidence heard by the Panel highlights the growing concerns around the limited resources available to help students with special needs, and the importance of funding in meeting these demands.

Recommendation two: The Mayor should lobby the DfE for further funding to meet London's unique education needs, by March 2020.

Inequality in outcomes for children across London

Whilst pupils in London are more likely to achieve better educational outcomes, at the end of both their primary and secondary schooling, compared to pupils elsewhere in the country,²¹ inequality is still an issue which detrimentally affects the life chances and lives of disadvantaged young people in the capital. By the age of 16, attainment among London's most disadvantaged young people lags an average of 12 months behind their more advantaged peers.²²

Analysis by the Education Policy Institute contends that throughout the stages of childhood, negative and positive factors act to mediate the relationship between socio-economic position and educational attainment. These factors can accumulate over time to increase the likelihood that a disadvantaged child will fall further behind a more affluent child.²³

London enrolls a much higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than the English average. Around one fifth of pupils in London are eligible for free school meals (FSM), which is used as a proxy for poverty.²⁴ Research shows that children eligible for FSM do not do as well as their peers who do not receive FSM.²⁵ At the Education Panel's private briefing with The Centre for Education & Youth last November, Members heard that two of the largest underperforming groups in London are black Caribbean and FSM-eligible white boys.²⁶ Both groups are less likely to achieve good educational outcomes and more likely than many of their peers to experience exclusion²⁷ or involvement in the criminal justice system.²⁸

An example of good practice that the Panel heard about is the extended schools model and the impact it has on educational outcomes. The model provides a range of activities and services beyond the school day such as breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, enrichment tuition and health and wellbeing support onsite. Sophie Howes, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Child Poverty Action Group, shared that services that support low-income households without stigmatising them have a positive impact on educational outcomes²⁹. Support for low-income

²¹ Greater London Authority, Annual London Education report, 2017

²² LKMco, [Boys on track: Improving support for Black Caribbean and Free School Meal Eligible White Boys in London](#), December 2018

²³ Education Policy Institute, key drivers of the education disadvantage gap, 2018

²⁴ London Datastore, [Key stage 4 and multi-academy trust performance \(revised\)](#), June 2019

²⁵ Education Policy Institute, Education in England: Annual report 2019, July 2019

²⁶ LKMco, [Boys on track: Improving support for Black Caribbean and Free School Meal Eligible White Boys in London](#), December 2018

²⁷ Department for Education, Pupil exclusions, 2018

²⁸ Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Statistics 2016/17, 2018

²⁹ London Assembly, Education Panel, [Overview of schools in London and inequality in outcomes for children across London](#), September 2019

families should also include affordable and accessible childcare for low-income families, as they enable parents to work. The Education Panel recognises the Mayor's Early Years Hub aims to support parents with low incomes and make it easier to access free early years education. The pilot is still running, however findings from the pilot should be shared to see if it is working effectively. The pilot is funded till December 2020, and if emerging findings suggest that the program is working well to ease the pressure felt by parents of young pupils, then provisions should be made to expand the program and extend it past December 2020.

The Panel's guests also raised the issue of students transitioning from primary school to secondary school, and then to post-16, and how schools can identify vulnerable pupils who face challenges in attainment and may have difficulty making that transition. The Panel recognises the Mayor is working through his Stepping Stones programme to bridge that gap between primary and secondary schools with 15 schools. The programme should be evaluated to see if it is working, and to find learnings that can be extended to the transition between secondary school and post-16 pathways, in order to help vulnerable pupils, access the opportunities to attain good quality work placements and experiences.

In addition to lobbying the DfE for additional funding to allow broader adoption of the extended schools programme, the Education Panel calls on the Mayor to provide more detail on how the Early Years Hubs pilots are performing, and how their impact will be evaluated.

Recommendation three: The Mayor should provide emerging findings on the Early Years Hubs pilots, as well as plans for an impact evaluation after the pilot finishes in December 2020.

The Panel acknowledges that often children do not face a single disadvantage in isolation, and that inequalities can have a lasting impact on lives. Sharing information to identify vulnerable pupils and support their transition from primary to secondary, and then to post 16 pathways, is crucial in tackling these inequalities.

Recommendation four: The Mayor should work with schools, local councils and other education stakeholders to ensure there is sufficient robust information and intelligence available to identify pupils with low academic attainment, and to share this information between institutions. The Mayor should give a commitment to doing so by March 2020, in order to support students making the transition from primary to secondary school, and from secondary school to post-16 pathways.

Teacher recruitment and retention

During the formal meeting, the guest panel highlighted the challenges associated with teacher recruitment and retention. The Panel heard that often it is difficult for teachers to find affordable housing in London, and that school budgets don't allow teachers to be paid more to be able to afford appropriate housing in London.

I know that schools, and groups of schools, can try to implement many creative initiatives to attract teachers, and certainly in my own borough there is a good record on getting newly qualified teachers across our schools (whether they are the academies or the community schools). However, the challenge is in retaining teachers once they have been recruited.

The National Foundation for Education Research has identified that London's teacher labour market will have an "acute challenge" over the next decade, in respect to supply, retention and mobility in the capital.³⁰

As you yourself believe, the cost of housing can make it tough for public sector workers, such as teachers, to live in London.³¹ While you are working on providing affordable housing for middle income earners, a more specific effort is needed to ensure that teachers can be retained to have a positive impact on the quality of education.

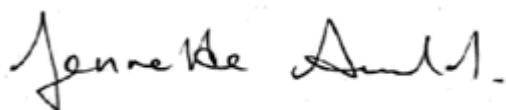
The Panel is aware that some work has taken place including the Mayor's 'Teach London' and 'Getting Ahead London' schemes to help teachers access financial support. It is the Panel's view that in addition to lobbying the DfE for more funding to support teachers, the Mayor can do more to build on existing programmes to provide affordable housing for teachers.

Recommendation five: The Mayor should encourage the recruitment and retention of teachers in London by providing more specific avenues to access affordable housing as part of Teach London. The Panel asks for an update on next actions and timelines for this by March 2020.

We urge you to act to ensure that all young Londoners get the high-quality education and support they need to meet their full potential, with additional funding, support and staffing provided for pupils with complex levels of need.

We would appreciate a response to our recommendations by 3 March 2020.

Yours sincerely,



Jennette Arnold OBE AM
Chair of the Education Panel

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Worth, J., Rennie, C. and Lynch, S. (2018). Teacher Supply, Retention and Mobility in London. Slough: NFER

³¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/teach-london/housing-teachers>