

Education Panel – 14 September 2016

Transcript of Item 6 – Delivering School Places for London

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just for information, the work of this Panel is reported back to the Greater London Authority (GLA) London Assembly's Oversight Committee.

I will now formally welcome our guests here today. Our guests are Assembly Member Joanna McCartney, the newly appointed Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare. I am sure you are going to be our favourite Deputy Mayor!

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): Thanks.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I have to say that we really feel responsible for creating your role, because it was in our recommendations to the former and current Mayors, so we wish you all the very best with your appointment.

Councillor Richard Watts, Leader of Islington Council, steeped in education, and is known for the leadership role that he played in introducing free schools for --

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Free school meals!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, you do not want that notoriety, do you? No. Free school meals. Welcome, Richard.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): With Assembly Member Twycross.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Absolutely. You had a great team working with you on that one.

We are waiting for Lucy Heller, Chief Executive of Ark Academy to join us. Lucy has been a guest with us previously.

It is a great pleasure to welcome Henry Stewart to our meeting. I know Henry well, Co-Founder of Local Schools Network and Chair of Governors of Stoke Newington School.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): I have just stepped down from the last one. I was Chair for nine years.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Oh wow, absolutely. You are still --

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Still Co-Founder of Local Schools. Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Co-Founder of Local Schools Network, and welcome.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Lucy [Heller], thank you for joining us, we are just introducing our guests here this afternoon.

The format of the meeting is very much a two-way discussion and what we have is three topics that we would like to touch on today. We have given you notice of those. The first one, if you like, is the vexed question of school places, then we want to touch on the issue of the funding for schools. We then want to also get a better understanding of the role of the Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare.

What I am going to do is start the questions. The first question is going to be to you, Joanne. I wonder if you could tell us what your priorities will be during the current Mayoral term.

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): This is the general role of the Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The general role, yes.

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): A new administration gives a freshness and an ability to look afresh at this agenda. I am also aware that the funding that the previous Mayor had from the Department for Education (DfE), plus £20 million worth, that he spent on his London Excellence Fund work, is coming to an end. My priorities really, I have put them into four priorities or four themes. The first must be about ensuring that London's children get the best start in life. That is about improving access, quality and affordability of childcare and early years' education. We know, and all the evidence points to the fact that access to quality early years' education helps children to be school-ready-to-learn and has a major impact on later progress and attainment. It also supports the Mayor's other wider priorities of tackling child poverty, maternal employment rates and the gender pay gaps. We could have some impact there.

Secondly, the thorny question that we are looking at today about the provision of school places and the challenge that represents to London.

Thirdly, a priority around school leadership and teaching. There are two aspects to this: one is supporting excellence in teaching and leadership in our schools, and that would be building on some of the work the previous Mayor has done in this area. We know that all the evidence shows that investment here in quality teaching has the biggest impact on progress and attainment for our children. Secondly in this area is to do something around increasing staff recruitment and retention. We have recently been approached by the Teaching Schools in London and asked to look at how we can work with them to support teacher recruitment and retention, and we will be meeting them in the next few weeks. I know that is a piece of work that you are going to be looking at as well.

I know you have highlighted before the particular challenge that we will have with recruitment of sufficient leaders in our schools. This Friday we are having the official launch of the Mayor's Getting Ahead programme, where 60 aspiring Head Teachers will be coming to City Hall. That programme ensures that they are given one-to-one coaching, mentoring and other opportunities of developing their leadership skills. That is something that we can work together on over the next few years.

Fourthly, the main priority that I am looking at is an important piece of work about preparing our young people for life and work in the city. We certainly could do more at Key Stage 5. We know that we do very well in London in the Key Stages up to there, but Key Stage 5 attainment is not necessarily sustained from Key Stage 4. In particular it seems to be the dropout rate from vocational courses, so there is a lot that we can and should be doing about improving quality careers advice in the city. You will be aware that the GLA are working on developing careers clusters, so I think we could do more of that work.

Secondly, the London Ambitions programme is creating better links between schools and employers. I have a dual role, I am an Assembly Member, and having sat last week on our Economy Committee we are looking at apprenticeships and the vocational sector. There is a piece of work to do with schools around highlighting the importance of those vocational pathways, so that is something that we can work towards. That is obviously an agenda where I will be working closely with the Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, Jules Pipe [CBE], as because the skills agenda will fall into his portfolio.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Very good. Before I ask you questions on what you have just said, what role do you envisage in terms of the key issue that we are concerned here with, one of the key issues today, and that is the lack of numbers of quality school places for London's children? Over the next five years we will need over 100,000 places. I think that breaks down to over 40,000 for primary, 60,000 for secondary schools. What role do you think you can have in the major issues that are affecting parents today? Today parents have children in temporary classrooms, overcrowded facilities. What do you think you can bring to that agenda?

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): That is obviously a difficult and challenging issue for London, but the Mayor obviously has a convening role where he can identify and support strategic priorities and the challenge of school places is one such challenge. I do not know how much detail you want me to go into. What we can do, because I know you will be asking questions a little later on, but certainly the GLA have done work in supporting the boroughs to plan their future requirements. We work on school roll projections. We have proposed to do a further analysis of DfE data on school applications towards the end of the year, looking at more detail on supply and demand on different areas. Schools Atlas, you will be aware of, is a useful planning tool for boroughs, as well for the parents looking for school places.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Therefore, you see that commitment going forward?

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You do not see yourself withdrawing from that joint work?

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): No we do not. Given the challenge is so great, it is vitally important to work closely with our colleagues in the London Councils to do that. There obviously then is the planning function that the Mayor has here, and there will be a revisit and a review of the London Plan. I think all of us would hope that we could beef up some of those requirements for school and childcare places, as that Plan develops.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Just going back to what you have said, and we welcome all that you have said, can I just then tease you and say you are bringing an extra level to an area where there are already statutory responsibilities, where there are now other organisations that are providing schools, like the Ark Academy. How do you think you are going to manage that relationship? As we know the Mayor does not have a statutory responsibility.

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare):

No, the Mayor does not. I would give credit to the previous Mayor actually. Through the London Schools Excellence work he did develop many relationships with many schools across all different sectors in the city. It is incumbent on us to use those collaborations going forward. Of course we are in a state of flux with the structures of our schools in London. The *Education White Paper*, only a few months ago, set out proposals which is to take away some of the local authorities' powers with regards to school improvement. We have had the Green Paper published last Friday, which again adds a different complexity to this issue. I think it is a changing landscape. The importance of having the GLA involved, able to harness all the different players in this sector and to collaborate and convene on strategic priorities is probably ever more important going forward.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): From our work and from our correspondence with the previous Mayor (Boris Johnson MP), the previous current Mayors were able to identify many of the issues that we raised, similar to the areas that you will be covering in your brief. It is fair to say we identified one of the strengths of that work was this real tight relationship that the former Mayor had with the then Secretary of State [for Education], Michael Gove MP, who indeed it was so tight he sent money to the GLA to make things happen. How strong is the relationship currently with the Secretary of State for Education?

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare):

I can only say that she is a London Member of Parliament (MP), so I would expect that she would understand the particular challenges in London, and we are going to want to talk to her and her department and highlight that those challenges remain. We have two particularly important funding consultations that we need to lobby on quite strenuously. One is the earlier funding consultation, which is out at the moment, and we will be sending a response in the next couple of weeks to that, because there are various issues for London about making sure that there is a sufficient area of cost adjustment in there to meet London's needs. Secondly, the schools funding formula, which we were all pleased was delayed for a year. We are expecting that to return to us at the end of this year, early next year, and of course there will be some strenuous lobbying to be done around that.

Therefore, I would hope to have a very close relationship with the Secretary of State for Education. I am sure Sadiq [Khan, Mayor of London] knows her as a London MP and there is some relationship there. However, of course at officer level officers are still continuing to meet with officers in the DfE and there is a very healthy debate going in there. Government realises that with the success of London we have a lot we can share with the rest of the country and we would be very keen to do that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Absolutely. Thank you for that. We all will be watching this relationship grow.

You talked about the Mayor having this programme [London Schools Excellence Fund] and some of it is very successful, and certainly I am on record as a supporter of some aspects of that. We asked in one of our reports for the best part of that work to be continued and we are glad to hear that that is going on. I remember Assembly Member Boff being very exercised about the Gold Club, and that was part of the London Schools Excellence Fund. Is the Gold Club going to continue? We were never sure once you have your gold star whether you kept it for life as a school, or whether you had to reapply. I am sure that is still a big question out there, so have you had any thoughts about that particular aspect of what you have inherited?

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare):

Gold Club is continuing this year, because schools are in that process, so I do think we want to disrupt that. It

is fair to say that I am looking at what we can do with the learning from the Gold Club. It had a very good intended purpose, which was peer-to-peer, school-to-school learning about how you close the gap between disadvantaged groups. It certainly had an excellent advisory group, and those skills I would not want to lose to the department here. We would want to return the expertise and the learning but we need to recognise that there is a changing environment out there. We now have teaching schools and teaching schools alliances who, as part of their purpose is to do some of that school improvement and best practice learning. If we could look at what has happened there. We certainly do need to do some work with regards to sharing best practice, as to how you close that gap. I noticed, Chair, you were tweeting this afternoon about the differentials between working-class grades, it is something the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) particularly highlighted. Therefore, we can look at what we can do to broaden the work we do around disadvantage and perhaps put it at a more sub-regional level and have not only individual schools involved, but a more regional level involved in that work. Strategically that might make more sense.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just to follow on, Joanne, whenever we talk about disadvantaged and we highlight one group, I just always love to add the dire conditions that there is within the Traveller and Romany community, where there is about only 23% of the young people in that community achieve any grade at all, so hugely disadvantaged.

You have talked about some of the really good aspects of the ongoing work, so I will not go any further into that, except to say has any panel member got any comments to the Members about what you have heard from the Assembly Member?

Richard, is she on your turf? Is she going to give you grief?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I hope not.

Joanne McCartney AM (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare): It is a partnership.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): It is a partnership. I am also Chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Children and Young People Board and we have done some work in that and trying to understand and pick where we think the problems in the school place planning system really are. It is not so much the identification of school places, GLA provides base data, most boroughs then add to that with extra local knowledge to come up with the kind of picture that London Councils has set out in their recent report. You do need that element of local knowledge to flesh out what is actually happening in a particular area.

The real problem is, and we think LAs have the legal responsibility to provide school places, without having any of the legal powers necessary to do that. The LGA has talked for some time about how we can ensure that the LAs have the power to work the academies to get people to expand. If the majority of our secondary schools are academies, as is true for many London boroughs, LAs have no power to push if push comes to shove, to force an academy to expand against its will, and that puts LAs in a very difficult position. Similarly we have no powers over the allocation of free schools at all. Free schools are the only route now through which new schools can be created. Therefore, we are put in this incredibly invidious position where we have responsibility with no power to do that.

What I would personally actively welcome, and I think I speak for some borough leaders, but not all of them in saying this, is where the DfE holds powers over London, like the allocation of free schools, like the power to work with academies, that is passed down to City Hall. Personally, I think, it is better the decision about

London are made in London. I do not think there is much to be gained from passing the powers of the boroughs up, because quite a lot of those are best exercised at that more local level where you can get a better grip of what is going on. We absolutely think there is a role for the Mayor in much of this kind of work. The real problem here is the disconnect between the powers and the responsibilities to solve the places crisis that there absolutely is in London.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): What about the Regional Schools Commissioners, have you had any meetings with them, both in your LA role and that of leader of a borough where you have got some need for new school places?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Our officers have, I have not. My view and the LGA's view and I think London Council's view is that the Regional Schools Commissioner setup is a mess. There is not a Regional Schools Commissioner for London. There are three or four split up, so we and Hackney find ourselves in different areas. We are in the same Regional Schools Commissioner area as Berkshire. We are not in the same one as Hackney, next door to us. It is daft. We think there is again a strong role for if you are going to have Regional Schools Commissioners, if that is a tier in the system you are going to have, which my own view is the concept is flawed, but if you have it, it is much better for there to be a single one accountable to the Mayor at City Hall than there to be three different ones serving different bits of London, directly accountable to the Secretary of State.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Henry, anything you have to say to the Panel from what you have heard from the Deputy Mayor for Education?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): I have more to say on the funding and local governance issues, but that is coming next, is it not?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): On the school places it is important to remember there is both the need to build the places and the need to fill [the vacancies for] the teachers. There is potentially a role there for the Assembly. The Mayor talked in the campaign about key worker housing and things like this. One of the big challenges in attracting teachers to London will be housing, both from the rest of the country and potentially from abroad. I do not think that is in the Assembly's plan, but if the Assembly could do something on enabling priority in housing for key workers like teachers that would be a major benefit for the whole of London.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Just to emphasise that, it would be really interesting if you could take on those two. The biggest barrier we have to staff recruitment is housing, overwhelmingly. You would probably be looking for something in the London Plan about housing and key workers like teachers and social workers.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Very good.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): I would just underline that and say that for us it is more about retention and recruitment. We find that we are getting the young teachers who are prepared to come and live like sardines in flat shares and tiny spaces. We can keep those, and they come drawn by the magnet that is London. Our problem is retention and that as soon as people start families, get married, they actually want, not unreasonably, to have flats, homes, that is the difficult bit. That is true across the sector and that is true even in the independent sector. This is part of the larger problem about London housing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We have heard that time and time again in the life of this Committee and have forwarded on that concern to anybody who wants to listen to us. So glad to be on the same page as you.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): The best thing that the GLA and the Mayor could do for London education would be to sort housing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair):

We have the next set of questions from Assembly Member Arbour, and sufficient school places we are staying with.

Tony Arbour AM: That is right. We are aware that as a city, in London Council's report, *Do the Maths*, it said that there was going to be a shortage of 118,000 places this year. How many places was London short, and indeed is it really short?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): The London Council's report is based on the actual data that Local Authorities pass to the DfE that goes into the DfE's place planning system. It is, as I understand it, as good a data as is available to anyone. It is not based on projections, it is based on the actually hard data that --

Tony Arbour AM: My note says it was a prediction.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): It is a prediction as it goes forward. Sure. In terms of the number of places we were actually short, I do not know off the top of my head, although we can certainly write to you with that information. What happens is LAs become very good at scratching around at the last minute to try to find places, bulge classes, portacabins and a whole range of other stuff as well, so places get found, because there are not that many children in London without a school place to go to at all. What it is thought is an increasingly unsatisfactory accommodation and an increasing stretch on school budgets, and it is not sustainable to go on that way.

Tony Arbour AM: Is it a fact that the DfE are actually projecting an excess of school places this year in London?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I do not know.

Tony Arbour AM: My notes says that there will be, very actual numbers, 0.7% is probably quite a lot of places, excess this year.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): If you are running at a 0.7% surplus of places I do not think it would feel to be full to many parents. The average London parent would find that running at that level of surplus would not give any choice of where they sent their child to. It is broadly considered good practice, when I was Lead Member for Children in Islington and we were looking at school place planning locally, to have 5% spare capacity, because that is the level at which parents might actually get some choice about where they send their children. That is the level that could allow a local area to deal with shocks to the system. Therefore, 0.7%, if that is what it is, is incredibly tight, and it certainly would not lead to families getting much choice, which is why I think parental perception across London is that there is a school places crisis. What there is, is an inexorable rise in the child population of the city with no strategy in place to manage that.

Tony Arbour AM: This is a perennial problem matching the empty places to where the demand is, because we know that indeed within boroughs there are schools which are not full, but we are fond of portraying London - it is a bit like housing - as a place where there is absolutely no spare capacity at all. Except that on analysis, looking at it borough-by-borough and school-by-school there is actually capacity. Perhaps we should be talking about if we are seeking to have additional school places, seeking to target it in the places where they are needed. I appreciate, of course, that we have no role in this, except possibly as a planning authority. You will recall, certainly Joanne [McCartney] will recall that the only time the last Mayor interfered with Metropolitan Open Land was to permit schools to be built on Metropolitan Open Land on the basis that the very special circumstances which allow you to build on metropolitan open land only applied to school places, and we sought to accommodate that.

I merely float those ideas because I can see they are not on your brief, but I have a special brief, which my people have given to me.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): If I might just state my case to the Members, on page 9 of the London Councils' report it says this year with think there is a shortfall of 1,200, broadly, secondary school places, across London, across, I do not know how many secondary schools there are in London, 200 say, you can accommodate that number of kids. You can find broom cupboards to educate people in. There are stacks of ways it can be done. It cannot be done for a 13,000 shortfall, when you get to 21 and 22. There is give in the system, it is not a hard number.

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, I am looking at the figure. London Councils are saying that you need £2.6 billion to provide sufficient school places over the next five years. That is big money and, I think it is you, have already mentioned that Local Authorities do not provide the places anymore. Effectively it is handed over to the free schools. This matches up with the point I have already made that in some boroughs there is not as big a shortage as in others. How can we actually direct free schools and the provision of these places to go to those parts of London which really need them?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): It is a major flaw in the system. The honest answer at the moment is we cannot. Free school decisions are made in an incredibly unaccountable way by the DfE. They never reference back to individual borough needs. I can give one example from my own borough. You might have read in the newspaper recently the DfE paid £55 million for a building off Highbury Vale in Jennette's constituency to provide a new secondary school because they believe - the borough does not necessarily - we need a new secondary school. There was no consultation with the borough about the building. There was no consultation with the borough about the provision. There was no consultation with the borough about the catchment area. The building is next to one outstanding-rated secondary school and 100 yards away from one very good-rated secondary school and is in the one bit of the borough where we do not need new secondary school places. Yet - without any reference back to the LA - an astonishing sum has been paid for this building that could provide three mainstream secondary schools on different sites with conventional procurement mechanisms. When we said, "Hold on, we have just seen from the Land Registry you have bought a building in our borough" the DfE said, "We were going to talk to you about that". There is this astonishing mismatch which I cannot believe is in the best interests of the taxpayers of London.

The current school place planning issue is very pressing. We do a very good role with the powers we have. That is largely to work in partnership with academies and a whole range of other stuff. Where there are good Local Authority and academy relations is not a problem. We can work in with maintained schools which are still the majority of the primary sector in London to expand maintained schools. That all works very well. Boroughs do a good job in difficult circumstances. It is incredibly unhelpful that there is not the involvement of London

government - in its broadest sense - in free school decisions about London and also in working with academies where there are difficult local relations but where expansion is needed.

Tony Arbour AM: I was about to address my next remarks to Ark. There is right across the political board from those of us who are in - I nearly said local government but in light of discussion we had earlier this morning - regional government there is a view that the funding people are completely bonkers paying these mad sums of money that no one else can afford.

For academy chains like Ark, presumably as a policy matter you could seek to increase the number of places where the places are most required rather than - in the example we have just had - having places provided where there may possibly already be a surplus. Does Ark look to go to places where they are needed?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Yes. That is an easy one to answer, of course we do. Generally I can say - I hope without fear of contradiction - that we have very good working relationships with all the LAs who are acting, and have worked together jointly to procure new schools in a number of the London boroughs. That is fine. It is counterproductive on every side to create schools where there is not a place need.

Tony Arbour AM: In your new role, Joanne, what do you actually think you and the Mayor can do to increase the number of school places? What can you actually do given that we know money is only available for free schools?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I talked earlier about the forthcoming London Plan and whether we could put any requirements in there. We are probably pushing at an open door on that. Again, we do not have levers to force. It is like the authorities. It is about working in collaboration. There certainly is a good officers' group meeting between our respective bodies to try to come up with how we can work together on school places in the form of a school places plan. There has been a particular issue historically about across borough collaboration on schools. Traditionally LAs were always reluctant to put a school on the borough boundary on the basis that that catchment would be for the neighbouring borough. With the new landscape we are looking at we can perhaps do a bit more to try to foster some of those more collaborative arrangements.

Of course, we have a relationship with the Education Funding Agency (EFA). When they are spending their money if they could have regard to what myself, to councils and others in the sector are saying about putting their --

Tony Arbour AM: Do you think they might?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I would hope so. I am looking at the London Councils' report and 17 free schools were opened in areas where secondary pupil numbers were expected to fall which seems an absolutely bonkers policy. The EFA has a reputation to uphold. If it wants to uphold it, it has to look to what the demands actually are in our city.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): The only thing I would want to say in defence of the EFA or those involved is that pupil place planning is an art and not a science. You are talking often about making plans three or five years hence given planning permission, finding sites and construction. It is difficult to get it right. In some cases it is the only places you have to build new schools. Certainly one of our schools in Brent was not the location we would have chosen to meet the specified need that was identified, it was just the only site that could be found. We have still got a catchment area that covers that area of need. It is never going to

be perfect because you are dealing with all sorts of uncertainty. Benefit changes and everything else have hugely changed population patterns in London. Regarding your point about areas where there is surplus supply, that is because people have moved out. Large numbers of families on benefits have moved out of central London. It is outer London that is taking the surplus.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I come in here, does that speak to the strategic role then? It says we have to move away from this 'knee-jerk' reaction. We have been saying it time and time again. It is not just good enough to be looking at it year-on-year. We have to take it strategically and that is why we wanted to talk about the next five years.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): I completely agree. One of the things is that no population fits neatly within borough boundaries. It clearly should be an across London conversation.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Henry, can I just bring you in here before I call on Fiona to take us on to attainment and performance. From your school network and what you have heard this morning, where has been the difference and what do you pick up from members of your network?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): What I want to talk about is the success in London that we have had. Remember it has not all been there. When my youngest went to primary school in 2002 Hackney was bottom of the primary school table nationally and bottom of the secondary school table. If you look at the tables this year, Hackney is top in the entire country for writing. It is fifth for primary school overall; reading, writing and maths. It is in the top ten for secondary. That is on absolute figures. It was top of value-added a couple of years ago, but that is on absolute figures. It is up there with the leafiest boroughs. It is not just Hackney. Islington will be able to tell a similar story.

If we look at why that has happened, people talk about many factors. However, a couple of key things are under real threat. One is funding. One of the lessons of London is funding works. If you fund to a decent level good schools, that know what they are doing, you get good results. You get a good education and it works. That is under deep threat. It is under threat at the moment. Schools are facing cuts this year because of various increases and no increase in funding. Of course, the funding formula is in danger of completely changing the London landscape. The Assembly has to be involved in resistance to that.

The other key thing that is very clear - certainly in Hackney, and I think Islington and other boroughs - is involvement of the LA that got schools together, developed learning and developed collaborative working. The LA was very clear about which schools were succeeding and which were not and intervened in those that were not. The school improvement service - which is in danger of being taken out if that White Paper becomes law - was absolutely crucial. I know this as Chair of Governors. At a time when - in hindsight - we were a bit complacent the LA came in and said, "No, we know you are above average but you are not doing well enough for your kids". It grabbed us by the neck, provided support and provided that challenge.

People in our network consider there is a real danger that if we look back in ten years' time London may not be the success story it is now as those two key elements - the LA role, particularly school improvement from my point of view, and funding - may disappear. Suddenly we will have an atomised system of schools. We will have less funding. I agree other parts of the country need more funding for education but there is a real danger as to what will happen to London. We must celebrate the success London has had. It is an amazing success. All the top schools in the value-added tables are London ones. However, we have to do something to stop this disappearing. The real danger under the white paper and under the funding formula is London's success will be removed and London may no longer achieve the same.

Fiona Twycross AM: I wanted to start my questioning by asking Councillor Watts whether you could outline the general discussion that took place during the London Councils Education Summit on 5 September 2016, particularly what key issues were raised in relation to improving the capital's schools.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I largely agree with some of the stuff Henry said. A critical issue is funding and how we come out of the conversation on the national funding formula. London Councils did really interesting work that said bringing other bits of the country up to London's average level of funding costs the Government £500 million a year. That is a lot of money but in the grand scheme of central Government spending it is not that much money. The DfE has put aside about £600 million to fund schools converting to academies and the evidence shows an already good school converting to an academy makes no difference at all to its performance. If we are going to be spending money on school improvement then Henry is absolutely right, the schools outside London deserve a fair funding deal. The money is there in the system to do that. However, they should not cut the centre of educational excellence in the country in order to make that happen.

We have talked a bit about teacher recruitment. That is a very genuine issue. Housing is the critical issue in that. I completely agree with Lucy's [Heller] analysis about at what stage in people's careers they begin to get fed up with living in a room in a shared house and they want to move out of London.

Sir Michael Wilshaw [Chief Inspector, Ofsted] used that conference to give his own personal views about grammar schools and where we go with that as well. It is a topic to get into if we want but he was pretty trenchant in his views about the damage that a more selective system would do to the London school system. That was the news story that came from the event.

I would add that to some extent in this, small stuff is beautiful. I know personally all the Head Teachers in my secondary schools and we have that kind of relationship where we have got a really good idea about what is going on in our schools. The list of schools that we are concerned about in the borough is a fair bit longer than the list of schools that the Regional Schools Commissioner is concerned about. They cover a tenth of the population of the whole country so they have no idea what is going on actually on the ground. They only realise there is a problem when they start to see it in the data which is three years after it happens and when people's life chances are already starting to be affected. We do have to maintain that sense of local leadership and local collaborative working.

London Challenge was probably the most successful school improvement programme in any developed area anywhere in the world. People are internationally looking at what can be done to replicate London Challenge. That is a city-wide initiative that had a lot of work to it. It cost a lot of money but it really worked. There are roles of looking at city-wide collaboration and understanding what really good schools Islington can teach really good schools in other boroughs and vice versa.

As far as the local authority role goes, I sit on the DfE Advisory Board advising the Secretary of State on what the LA role in education will be going forward. There is quite a lot of water to go under the bridge before we actually know what the LA role will be. The push back against the forced academisation of schools has led to something of a sea-change at the DfE in regard to their thinking about some of these issues.

Fiona Twycross AM: We can look forward to some good news from the DfE in terms of local authorities --

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Less bad news certainly. We will see. As I said, there is a lot of discussion still to go.

Fiona Twycross AM: Less bad news is always good. Generally across the piece, which groups of pupils perform particularly well - have relatively high levels of attainment - in London and which groups are performing less well?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I do not have the precise figures to hand, I am afraid. [Sir] Michael Wilshaw has himself identified that there remains a white working class issue in schools nationally and in London as well. I look at my own borough's figures and assume they are typical of much of inner London. We do particularly well with achievement from some Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, particularly black African communities and others. The middle class kids do well in regards to their schooling regardless of anything. There is a lot of quite established work done that sets out the demographic groups that do well. Inevitably some schools deal with those challenges better than others.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. I wonder if I could move on to ask other panel members about attainment and what you see as the main challenges for raising the attainment of London's primary and secondary schools' students.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): The main challenges with those groups are addressed by the two things that all heads will talk about now; the challenges represented by recruitment and retention and funding. I would not overemphasise either. Both are absolutely key. As a growing network we have seen for the first time our Government funding fall in absolute levels this year. Schools are facing a tough time. It is not that there are no solutions to that. We have lived through - although we did not know it at the time - a golden age of school funding. We will not see that again. Like everybody else, I share concerns about what the national funding formula will do. I understand the desire to have a more sensible and more consistent structure across the country. Unfortunately, it has been left too late. If it had been done ten years ago when you could have levelled up people that would have been workable now. My fear would be if you ever got to a solution the cries of those who lose out are going to ring much louder than the delight of those who get more money. Money does make a difference.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. You would concur with that, would you?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Yes. As I have said, funding is absolutely crucial. As Lucy says, absolute levels of funding have gone down at the same time as an increase in national insurance the pension levy and there is an increase in pensions as I well, is there not?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Yes.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Increased costs and reduced funding is a crisis now for schools, not in the future but this year.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I would agree with everything that was said. It is also important that if there is a change in funding that there are transition arrangements in place so schools and authorities can plan for it fully.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. If I could move back to Lucy Heller for a moment and then bring other people in. Councillor Watts mentioned the size of the areas and number of schools that the Regional Schools Commissioner would cover. What role do you see the Regional Schools Commissioners playing in improving standards in schools? Have you got examples of where they have intervened successfully to support a struggling school?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Like Zhou Enlai [Premier of China] said when asked about the effects of the French Revolution, it is too early to tell. It is a very new system. They have - as Councillor Watts has pointed out - extremely large regions. I understand why they did the carving up of London, but from a London perspective it really does not make sense that there is not somebody looking on a London-wide basis. It is too early to say.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): It is too early to tell but they simply do not have the funding or closeness to schools to play the same role as is being played at the moment. We have got 33 boroughs, each with a school and pupil service and each with expertise in that area. I am very heartened that Richard [Watts] said this may not be happening, but my fear from the white paper was that will be stripped out. Can we really say that will not have any effect on schools? It would take away all the expertise that has been there. Hopefully Richard is right and that will remain. However, if that is replaced by Regional Schools Commissioners with a very limited amount of resources and much more distant, they will not know every Head Teacher in their area --

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Can I just rudely interject? I am a great fan of local authorities but we have to acknowledge that the record is deeply mixed. There are local authorities that have done a terrific job. Already most LAs do not have the resources to do the school improvement job effectively and many of them do not. I am agnostic. I am only interested in how you drive up standards. Schools are not served by a romantic notion that says that all LAs have done a good job because they clearly have not. While we keep saying that funding is challenging and all those things are true there is still a huge job to be done. Even in London - with the best results in the country - we have got only 60% of pupils achieving five GCSEs. There is more to be done and we should not say that councils have the monopoly on wisdom.

Tony Arbour AM: Bravo. Look at those places where the boroughs --

Fiona Twycross AM: Hang on. Excuse me.

Tony Arbour AM: Sorry, I was getting carried away.

Fiona Twycross AM: I was going to bring Richard Watts in who is looking very eager to defend the role of the Local Authority.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): There are good and bad bits all the way through the school system. There are more and less competent local authorities. There are more and less competent academy chains.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): I completely agree. We will be as tough on academies as --

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): For me there is a lot of evidence internationally that autonomous schools deliver good results. We have had autonomous schools in this country since 1990. Local authorities do not run schools. We are overseers of a system. What we have in this country are pockets of educational excellence. London has a disproportionate number of those for the United Kingdom (UK) in both the maintained and the academy sector. There are some pockets of real underperformance as well. There is a lot to learn from how we can get that system-wide change.

My argument is not necessarily that local authorities are all perfect. They are not. What you need is that level of middle tier in the system somewhere between the Secretary of State and the Head Teacher that drives co-operation and stuff like that. My mum was a teacher in Derbyshire where it takes you almost a day to drive across the country. Clearly it is a very different relationship that the local authorities has in a place like Derbyshire or Kent, or somewhere like that, than it does have in an inner London borough. It is telling that the places where we have seen more success in driving up standards tend to be the places where there are cosy enough relationships that [mean] that kind of relationship will work. It is telling that the best academy chains - and I certainly include Ark in that - - forgive me if I am introducing you [your points] Lucy but I hope I am not - are also saying, "There are limits on the expansion we want on our chain so we do not get too big because we are confident there are going to be diminishing returns after a period".

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Can I come back on it? Obviously some councils are better than others. Going back to 2002 the [London Borough of] Hackney was a disaster area.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We have moved on. We are in 2016 and we are in the top 10%.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): The solution was not to do away with it but to create the learning trust that is now part of the council again. That is what needs to be done. The answer to the fact that some councils are not so good is not to take away all councils' responsibilities. It is to deal with those that are not so good. The DfE's own figures comparing academy chain performances and council performances found that in the top 50 - if you put them altogether - there were only three academy chains. Ark was one of those three. It was in the top ten and is a very successful chain. However, the top eight were still council's. Therefore saying, "Some councils are not doing a good enough job so let us create a whole new structure and create all these academy chains" has not worked. Some are very good but in general it has not worked. We crucially need that role.

One of the problems at the moment with academies is when you talk to the heads of children services in councils they will normally tell you they have contacted the DfE about this school or that school - which is an academy - because they are below the standard they should be at. A common response from DfE is, "They are above the base level we are looking at. We have not got a problem with that." A defective council is far more on the case of local schools than a remote DfE or a remote [Regional Schools] Commissioner.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. If we can move away from that point and come back to Lucy Heller and return to the point around the different in attainment between different ethnic groups. How is Ark Academy addressing some of these differences?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): We start at the point of each child. We are very focused on the needs of each particular child and making sure that they reach their full potential. We have narrowed the gap in the same way as with pupil premium in London. For London schools most of the Progress 8 measures show virtually no gap between pupil premium and non-pupil premium kids. It varies a bit between schools and where they are. Similarly on ethnic mix there is more of a divide. It is less than the national average but it follows exactly what Richard [Watts] was saying that probably white working class is - in a sense - the disadvantaged group in terms of attainment. We work on addressing that at the level of each child.

Fiona Twycross AM: How does your success in this vary from other schools in London?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Ark has a very mixed economy of schools in London. Some are start-up schools and some are like King Solomon Academy. It has very high pupil premium but for its first GCSE results a couple of years ago they had 65% of kids on pupil premium. They are the top performing non-

selective school in the country at GCSE. Pupil premium kids actually did slightly better than those not on it. There was virtually no ethnic differential in there. There are also schools that are at the beginning of a journey from being in special measures where you see much wider gaps. In general our Progress 8 figures for London are 0.3 which is being partly diluted. You get something at the top like King Solomon which is 1.1 and a whole clutch of schools about 0.5, but 0.3 is our average across London.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. That is helpful. Particularly important in the context of potentially losing funding is the fact that while London has consistently come out on top of other regions in the country over the past few years international comparisons are not as flattering. I wondered whether our panel could comment on what they see as the main reason for our poor showing in London against other global cities.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): I found that a very odd study. It not only showed London behind internationally but also showed London behind the rest of the country.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Henry, are you talking about the University College London (UCL) study?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Yes. They are the only figures I have seen in probably eight years or so that have shown London behind other regions.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, it is consistently ahead of other regions.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): In that report it had it below other regions. In every other report it has had it above. A couple of facts I would bear in mind is that only 21 London schools were involved in that so it is a small sample. Secondly, it says they are a half year behind international comparisons. What it does not reveal is they took their test a half year before the other ones. They took their tests in November and December because they did not want to clash with GCSEs. The others took them between March and August. That is true is for all of the England cohort. That should be borne in mind as well. It is so out of line with all other studies that it should be treated with care.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Is it based on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, London Schools Network): Yes it is.

Fiona Twycross AM: Have other panelists got a comment on that? No, OK.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): It is worth reflecting there is a broad set of evidence. I am not aware of this particular study and I have not read it in the detail that Henry has. In respect to people speaking in different terms about how London is performing internationally, [Professor] Chris Husbands [Director] at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE) has said not that long ago that the improvement in London schools is not just the best in Britain but the best of anywhere in the developed world. There is strong support by other experts regarding just how well London is doing at the moment.

Fiona Twycross AM: Excellent.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I would agree with what Henry said earlier about the taking of those PISA tests. There was a six-month gap. There has recently been a round table discussion with DfE and officers here following that London PISA report.

Certainly what we have heard is that in that six months there is quite a large attainment gap that took place with London pupils. It is also important that they are testing different things than our students are studying at GCSE. The curriculum is very different. We are asking children six months early to do a set of tests on what they have not been taught. For example, GCSE maths is quite theoretical in our syllabus. The PISA test for maths is testing problem-solving skills. It also has quite a lot of reading involved as well which is something that perhaps our children are not quite so used to.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. Do you see a role for the GLA in monitoring performance against international competitors more closely?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): There is some work that could be done. I know you have looked at this before and doing a robust evaluation was going to be extremely expensive. I can say that our annual education report provider - Education Policy Institute - is going to be looking at some further analysis into the 2015 PISA results when they are available later on this year. No doubt we can get that evaluation and look at it.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Fiona, if I can just follow up, we did do a session on this. Given all the difficulties and constraints we came to a view that you cannot have it both ways. You cannot be there comparing London and say it is the first global city and it is this, that and the other but then when it comes to education you challenge any statements that have been made. What we got from the PISA centre was - this is a point we made to the then Deputy Mayor who had responsibility for education [Munira Mirza] - that if the Mayor and you took a strategic view for London of this - in the same way you are willing to compare other aspects of London life - and tried to find a way you could compare education internationally then that would do London well. That is especially when it comes to recruiting and when we come to see our students moving to other countries to get their degrees. It was worthwhile for a strategic view to be taken. That would make the cost cheaper. If individual schools are going to be left with the cost of getting involved in PISA then it would not happen. They were willing to have conversations with the then Deputy Mayor. We had a video conversation with the PISA representative in Switzerland, I think he was, and we left it to the Deputy Mayor then to carry on that conversation. Maybe I could write you a note about that, Joanne.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): The information I have is to get more schools involved and for us to bear the cost, it would run to several hundred thousand pounds which could be better spent elsewhere.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It could be better spent elsewhere but I also think it was left saying that the conversation had not been had to see whether or not that cost could be reduced. That is something we will press you on in a note. Our young people have to be geared up. You said at the start you want the best start in life. That best start in life has to continue. Our young people in London have to be competitive in terms of other world cities. They might not necessarily want to see themselves competing against a town anywhere in the UK.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): You have to be careful what you are spending your money on if all your spending is buying is the opportunity for London kids to sit exams. Kids in British schools are not under-tested. As Henry said there are lots of methodological issues with the PISA stuff. It goes up and down in fashionableness all the time as a credible test. There are lots of ways we can measure the success of the London school system against other people. I would caution against spending good public

money on volunteering London kids for some more tests in order to show something . There are two or three other international comparisons on school results as well --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We are concerned something is done so that we are clearer about where London kids stand in terms of their peers in other world cities. That is a good position to know about.

David Kurten AM: Going back to the issue of working class white children, British children, and particularly boys, is there anything we can do in the future to lift them up specifically? I know, Lucy, you mentioned looking at them on an individual basis but is there any kind of wider strategy for that group of people who are left behind at the moment?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): We have to remember that disadvantage starts early. By the time they reach school at the age of five kids from those kinds of backgrounds are behind. Schools are playing catch-up at primary and at secondary. There is only so much, to be honest, schools can do. We know one of the tragedies of the last six years is that Sure Start has been largely taken away. The strongest answer to that question has to be something at the preschool level. You are absolutely right, it is white working class boys who are the most challenged at school. There has to be something at an early stage. I do not know what role the Assembly can play in that but there is some preschool element.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): It is about schools making sure - this is true for every sort of group - that within the school you are speaking to those children. That they have the role models there whom they can see are doing it. That is one of the reasons why we are very focused on ideally have sixth forms in each of our schools. You need to see the people who look like you going off to university. You need to see the male teachers who look like you. Obviously in primary it is to make sure we have got that mix and that our school staffing reflects the intake.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I have got a five-year-old in a very mixed state primary school. The difference in performance at the age of four when he started in the different backgrounds is very high. Joanne's [McCartney] role in early years is absolutely critical to that.

One of the most dangerous things about the proposed separation of local authorities and school is the potential break in the link between schools and other family services. Successful LAs are using - I hate the name but it is a good programme - the Troubled Families Programme approach to wrap support around troubled families. Schools have to be part of that partnership effort to work to improve family outcomes and improve learning outcomes. My son's school forces all parents to have a reading diary where you have to read to your child every day and you get shouted at by your teacher if you do not. There is homework from the age of four and there is a whole range of other stuff. It is a very mixed inner city maintained primary school. Other good school providers do that kind of stuff. It is about shaping a learning environment at home. Kids spend 15% of their time each year at school and the other 85% really matters. It is that link between school and home that is really critical.

David Kurten AM: Why is it boys rather than girls who seem to be left behind, even though they might come from the same homes and same communities? You mentioned a little bit about having more male role models, male teachers and sixth formers. Is that the key issue or are there other things as well?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): There are a huge number of things. What we are seeing is the extension of what has always been the case. Girls - I am resorting to pseudo-science and pop psychology - tend to be more focused early on adult approval and attention and then it slides away. Once you get to A-level and university they lose that differential. That is shifting slowly. Also a lot of the way that school has

worked in recent years has tended to focus on concentrated and sustained effort that girls – again, it is a wild generalisation so I feel slightly reluctant – on the whole are better at terminal exams which are being reintroduced. They are something that many boys respond to better. It is part of a larger social issue. Some of that is about that engagement; boys having a sense of where they can find a place in the world that they are aiming for. There is not enough sense for many of them about what that looks like.

David Kurten AM: Yes, thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Maybe that is a topic on its own we should all focus on. We touched on the national funding formula. Before we leave the topic I have got two specific questions for the Deputy Mayor for Education and for Richard. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) highlighted that while the Government has yet to give any figures on how the proposed changes will affect current funding levels schools in many cities, including London, would be hit hardest. Are there any safeguards that could be put in place that would ensure no school sees a drop in funding? Is there anything, Richard, from your experience both in Islington and from across London?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): There are but it needs the Government to do it. You could just say, “No school will see a drop in funding”. It is an area where boroughs and academy chains – who are primarily London-based – and the GLA, using the political axis of the Mayor, do really need to work together to make a strong case for protecting the funding that has made London’s education system the success it is. Henry [Stewart] is right. We cannot overstate the threat that this cut to funding could have to London schools.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): The problem is remembering that from the perspective of outside London – we have schools primarily in London but also in Birmingham and on the south coast – they look at funding rates that are 50% or more for London and it always feels like London gets all the pies. The problem is that London needs that. We just said that with the expense of living in London it is all spent on staff. London is going to have to make a very good case nationally. It feels too easy from outside London to have the whole tenor of the current debate about London’s special status. It is hard to make that case but it is an absolutely vital one.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We are there with you, Lucy. What surprises us is we all say it and we all know it, but I do not know if it has been done and Government has rejected that. Going back to Richard, did some sort of consensus come out of the Education Summit about this issue? You have just had this summit. What did you send Sir Michael Wilshaw off [with] to pass on?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I am not sure Sir Michael needs anyone’s encourage to go off and pass on anything. I am not sure it will get us very far at the moment either. There is cross-party agreement across London that the national funding formula is problematic. Some outer London boroughs benefit from equalisation. It is not a universal picture. Inner London boroughs are disproportionately hit very hard. No one is arguing the current system makes any sense. It does not. It is based on historic funding levels, how much boroughs used to spend on schools. Tower Hamlets has £1,000 a pupil more than Islington and we have £500 a pupil more than Camden. There is no real logic to that. What we know in broad terms is that high funding levels deliver better results than lower funding levels, *quelle surprise*.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am going to read that the proposed funding goes the other way and will not make sense. How do we get something sensible going forward?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): There is both an argument that there is the money in the system to increase other areas closer to the London level if the DfE reallocates money it has already been given from stuff that does not make a difference.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): What would you suggest?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I would suggest shifting the money away from the forced academisation programme to do this.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): I do not know that there is enough actually.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We love the conversation but we have heard that Ark is not going to get any more and bigger. It may have been to stop others.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): There has been hundreds of millions of pounds - £600 million - repeatedly put aside for that. That is a start. That gets you through the first bit. London Councils' figures are it would cost £500 million to raise the rest of the country up to London average levels.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): On an annual basis?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): On an annual basis which is not --

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): So it is cheap.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Yes, which is - in national Government terms - cheap. The improvement to school standards that one can extrapolate that will have elsewhere in the country would mean it is an incredibly good value for money bit of Government spending.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Joanne, I am sure you are going to be working with the Mayor to have his say on it. Clearly a joint statement would be the best way forward.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): Yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can you confirm what plans you and the Mayor have in terms of working with the local authority and getting buy-in from other people to actually get a letter to the Secretary of State so officers can be briefed at the DfE to think again?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I am aware under the initial consultation there was a joint letter from the then Mayor and Jules Pipe, the leader of London Councils. We will certainly be working closely on this. I would hope we can make joint representations. I obviously entirely agree with Richard about bringing the rest of the country up to the level of funding for London schools. From the consultation process there is certainly an expectation that the Government will allocate additional funding for English as an additional language and some additional funding for an area cost adjustment element. A lot will depend on what weighting those particular elements have as to how that would affect London.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. We look forward to that joint letter and we would love a copy of it if you could let us have it. Henry, will the Network be putting in their tuppence worth?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): We will certainly be seen to support any fight on the funding issue. I am slightly worried that London schools are hesitant on it. They do get more money, as you said. We have to defend that. We have to say funding works. If those figures are right and it would only take £500 million to bring other schools up to the London level it is a pittance compared to the benefit that would result from it. It has to make sense. We have a government that was elected on a promise of a £5 billion cut in education funding. That is what they came to the electorate with. Labour was quite similar. We have a government that is committed to cutting education spending and that is scary.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Scary. Thank you. We have now got a question on the proposed changes to the role of local authorities. David, would you like to raise your questions?

David Kurten AM: You have given some of the answers to these already. With the changes happening in the white paper what are your key concerns about the proposed changes to reduce the role of LAs in education, if there is anything you have not said before? We have talked about Regional [Schools] Commissioners. We have talked about other things. Do you have any other concerns?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): It might be a recap but looking at it particularly from a London perspective, London local authorities almost universally - there may be a couple of exceptions - do a great job of supporting schools, including Newham and Waltham Forest who are listed as underperforming. I do not see them underperforming. They are very short on value-added. They have above national averages on GCSE results. There may be some councils - if you go to Stoke or Doncaster - which have a different picture. In London local authorities have a great track record and provide effective support. They have been a key part in the transformation of London school performance. There is the danger that could be lost.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I, obviously, agree with that. What is really important is not to fall into the trap of seeing local councils as school providers. I do not consider local councils as in competition with Ark or any other academy or trust to be a provider of schools. Headteachers and governing bodies run maintained schools. I would never dream of phoning up a headteacher in my patch and telling them what to do. I would get pretty short shrift if I did, and rightly so. We are - as convenors of the system - an advocate for the needs of particularly vulnerable pupils, a champion for parents, a champion for standards and the bringing together of people who need to talk to each other in a convening role. The Government's white paper was very soundly rejected by its own backbenchers, largely because of the lobbying of a lot of very unhappy Conservative councillors across the country who thought this was an insult to the work they had been doing on schools. Lots of Conservative MPs were saying off the record to the LGA when they were being lobbied, "I am being shouted about my councillors whenever I go back into my constituency. There is no argument I can use to persuade people this is a good idea. There is no evidence the forced academisation of schools will make any difference to schools' performance at all."

There has been a sea-change in DfE rhetoric towards local authorities since the collapse of the white paper just before the summer. There is now the Alan Wood [CBE, former President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services] review about what the role of the local authorities in schools should be. We do not yet know, in all honesty, what the proposals that come out of that will be. There is a direction of travel about all of that. There is much more rhetoric now that is seeing local authorities as convenors of a system, of people with some kind of overall leadership role although not as providers of schools. We have not been providers of schools since 1990 so I can live with that. Things are not nearly as certain as they were before the collapse of the white paper. We will have to keep a watching brief on how this one goes.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I will point out something Richard said earlier, most primary schools are still in the maintained sector. Amongst Head Teachers there is really no great desire to have to take over those roles of grounds maintenance, payroll, human resources (HR), whatever. They are services that local authorities provide that are very valued by primary heads.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Let us be clear, not only is there is no evidence that academies overall improve results but there is increasing evidence that their results are worse than similar local authority schools. I did my own analysis that has shown this. The DfE's value-added analysis and a report from an independent education unit - I have forgotten the name of the organisation - earlier again shows that particularly chains - Ark is one of two or three exceptions - have real difficulty. Standalone academies that used to be good or outstanding tend to do OK and as well as they have done before. Many of the schools put in chains increased their performance at a lower rate than those staying with a local authority.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): It is Education Policy Institute (EPI) you are thinking of, the Education Policy Unit probably known as CentreForum.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): That is it.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): The evidence is actually mixed. The London School of Economics (LSE) stuff is pretty good. That says on the whole the sponsored academies have done a reasonable job. I am certainly not here to say that all academies have done a good job. It follows the bell curve that any mixed group does. For sponsored academies there is a difference. On the converter academies the evidence seems to be slightly clearer. The LSE has shown that the converter academies that were outstanding have gone on improving since becoming academies. Those that were only good, and those that were satisfactory, have not. That is saying it is very mixed.

Looking at the evidence on academies versus local authorities the academy groups are generally made up of sponsored academies which were, after all, taken from what were deemed to be the worst schools in the country. They have a concentrated disadvantage. They were taken as bad schools. Local authorities have much more mixed economies. They have got much larger numbers. Therefore it is not surprising that you see greater variability in multi-academy trusts (MATs). This is not in defence of them. There is too much poor performance.

To your point on this question of strong local partnerships, we would all agree universally on a middle tier whatever the mechanism, whether local authority or Regional Schools Commissioners. You need somebody who is close and attached to schools and who knows them to get it right. The evidence from America is the same. Strong commissioning, strong accountability for whatever schools you have and strong support is what drives quality schools. It is not the monopoly of any particular provider. As with schools, it should be based on if you doing a good job, do more of it. If you are not, hand it over.

David Kurten AM: That brings me nicely onto the next point I was going to ask about. You have answered some of it already. It is to do with the partnership between local authorities, academies and other stakeholders. It is clear there is a good relationship between the Ark Academy chain and Islington which is fantastic.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Sadly no relationship. We try.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Ark has a reputation for being a very good co-operator with local authorities. The Harris chain has a reputation for being a very bad co-operator with local authorities.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): In their absence.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): It is horses for courses.

David Kurten AM: Where there is not, what can be done to improve the relationship so there is more joined up working between authorities, academies and other stakeholders so we can plan for the future and manage resources properly? Are there any ideas on how we can make it work where it is not working?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): It is outside the remit of the Assembly properly. I still would argue for - whether an academy or a maintained school - a role for local authorities in school improvement and in holding schools to account. As Alan Wood mentioned they may be your schools but they are our kids. The local authority has responsibility for all the children in its area. At the moment it cannot do much with those in academies. It needs some kind of responsibility but not to take them over because, as Richard says, local authorities have not run schools since 1990.

David Kurten AM: Some kind of statutory power?

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Some kind of statutory ability to raise issues and to hold them to account.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): It seems to me the danger is you confuse things with too many chiefs and too many owners. Academies may not be perfect - I agree with you probably on some of the issues that remain to be resolved - but we are strongly accountable to the Department and Regional Schools Commissioners. One of the problems at the moment is simply there is not - particularly for weaker schools, whether maintained or academies - enough in the system of balance and support that is possible if you need it. I was teasing some of the Regional Schools Commissioners and saying, "If you come around and you are not happy with what we are doing, what is your alternative? If I say I cannot cope do you have anyone who can come in and help me?" "No." "If you think we cannot do it do you have someone who is going to take over this school?" "No." We are dealing in a system where there is not enough capacity. We have collectively got an issue with capacity in the system. Most local authorities now do not have that capacity. There is a righted audience in the sense it is, as I understand it, absolutely right for a local authority - and they do - bring to the Department's attention when they are not happy with schools.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): There needs to be a middle tier.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): Yes.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): We are both agreed the Regional Schools Commissioner is not the right role for that.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): No, we are not agreed on that. It is more about the current structure. The current areas are probably too large. They need more resources.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): It needs to be local authority size.

David Kurten AM: One more about special educational needs (SEN), do you think the resources for funding SEN are being squeezed at all? If so, how are schools dealing with this?

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): They are. Schools are dealing with this well but there was a very, very major change to the SEN system a couple of years ago that came in with individual education, health and care plans, replacing statements and a whole range of other stuff as well. These are pretty significant changes. They are not inherently bad changes but they have been pretty underfunded both at LA and school level. It has left schools responsible for paying more money for kids with minor and medium levels of SEN. Again, there remain issues about how much can academies be bound to take. There is a whole range of other issues as well. We need to let the current system bed in but there are genuine funding challenges. We have not quite got all the lines of accountability in the system sorted out yet. We have not fundamentally moved away from what was a really conflictual system which is in no one's interest. That is at heart because there is just not enough money to go around.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Again, I would say it is not just this direct funding but a lot of schools put extra resources into that area. For instance, in Stoke Newington we would have one class with only ten kids in each year. What we called the 'nurture room' that was those kids who needed extra support. We learnt it from Osborne [Rt Hon George Osborne MP, Former Chancellor of the Exchequer]. We could afford that because the funding is enough to do it. If the funding gets cut that will get cut and those kids will no longer get that support. It is all mixed in together.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The last few minutes and it would be remiss of us to have this meeting and not say something about selective schools. Let me just throw you some quotes. Sir Michael Wilshaw has described the idea that grammar schools can overall attainment in schools as "nonsense". The former Prime Minister, David Cameron [Rt Hon David Cameron MP, has previously said that,

"Proponents of grammar schools are splashing around in the shallow end of the education debate".

This morning during Mayor's Question Time our Mayor said he is definitely against them.

Henry, starting with you. Have your say on the record. Do not forget you are live so you are on camera.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): OK, I didn't realise that. Virtually every educational expert in the country - from a right or left perspective - is clear that selection does not bring more benefits. If you look at the better performing boroughs in London - places like Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Islington - they are non-selective. The challenge for London is to get rid of the selection that is there at the moment in places like Bexley which is one of the worst performing boroughs in London in terms of results.

The issue England has - whether you look at PISA or anything else - is not the performance of the most able. They are doing fine. It is the performance of the less able and the more deprived. The poor kids do not get into grammar schools. We know on average 3% of the intake of grammar schools is free school meals compared to 18% overall. That was from the Sutton Trust. There is not a single grammar school in the country that has a proportion of free school meals above the national average, not one. They have had 70 years to sort this out so saying it is going to be sorted out now is very unlikely.

What problem is it addressing? It is very hard to find a problem that the data shows it addresses. It certainly does not address the issue of poor kids' performance. It does not address the issue of the 75% that would not be selected. It is a very odd policy. If you look at the data it is very clear, selection does not make sense.

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): On the contrary, I think a reasonable question to ask is how to drive the attainment of those the higher prior attainment. It is the wrong answer. I am not even sure that grammar schools necessarily do a great job in their own terms. One of our schools, King Solomon Academy, has higher value-added for its high prior attainers than any grammar school in the country. A number of our schools have higher value-added in terms of their higher attainers than the grammar school national average.

It is absolutely the case that you are not going to get the most disadvantaged into those grammar schools. I am suggesting grammar school is wrong. It is great education for everyone. Lots of people might individually say, "Yes, I would love my child to have a great education. Grammar school would be good for them." Nobody I see is voting for the four times larger proportion who would be going to what effectively become secondary moderns. In the counties where you still have selective systems - as Henry mentioned - on the whole the records suggest absolutely that. It is the wrong answer to a reasonable question. We certainly recognise the challenge we have of ensuring all children reach their full potential. That means the brightest as well as those who need more support. That is something comprehensive schools have not always been good at but they are now doing a much better job.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): There are going to be no Ark selective schools?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): No.

Henry Stewart (Co-Founder, Local Schools Network): Excellent.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am glad we brought you together with this question.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): I should make clear that the LGA and London Councils do not have formal positions on this. They are consulting their members. This is very much a personal view. Carrying on from what Henry said, of the 164 grammar schools at the moment the last figures I have available - which are 2012 - three of the 164 have more than 10% on free school meals against a national average of 20%. Twenty-one of those schools have less than 1% of their kids on free school meals. So as sure as night follows day, when you have selection you have middle class parents pushing out bright working class kids because they can pay for tutoring. That is absolutely what happens and it is utterly unavoidable in a selective system. Grammar schools are terrible for social mobility.

I would suggest they are terrible for school standards too. It is absolutely no coincidence that the areas in London that are doing best are the ones that got rid of selective schools. London would be very poorly served by taking the Government up on its offer to introduce selective education across the city.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Joanne, are you with the Mayor on this?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor of London and Deputy Mayor for Education for Childcare): I do agree with the Mayor on this. I cannot disagree with anything that has been said to date. If we look at evidence, what works is investment in early years and investment in teacher quality. If there is extra funding they are the areas that it should be going into.

Having been a Governor for 20 years at a variety of schools, both primary and secondary, and a recent Chair of Governors, I am aware that when Ofsted comes in to inspect you do not get that good or outstanding rating unless the school is adequately challenging those top students.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We have got Pippa Crerar [Reporter] from the *Evening Standard* agreeing with you. If even *Evening Standard* correspondents can be in agreement with members of this panel then we are all on the same page.

Can I thank you all for joining us today? We will put together a report of the discussions we have had and the evidence we have gathered to date. We will share it with you. If you have anything else to say to us then please do. We are left with a really encouraging session in terms of the work we have done to date. I thank the Deputy Mayor for what she told us in terms of continuing the work that went before, especially the excellent bits of that. Also we are glad to hear about the ongoing work on teacher recruitment and retention which is cool.

We heard from you about the mismatch between how the DfE approves free schools in areas where need is identified. Richard, that was a classic example of the 'oopsie' after they had bought a building with millions of our pounds in an area where that money was not need. I have forgotten the numbers you said.

Councillor Richard Watts (Leader of Islington Council): Including building refurbishment costs it was £55 million. We could have got three conventional schools.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You could have got three schools that are needed in that area.

You all agreed that funding is key to maintaining and improving attainment in schools. There was a consensus that schools are already being squeezed or the potential is there for them to be squeezed and made worse by the new national funding formula.

We heard, yet again, about the Regional Schools Commissioner's patch which separates boroughs. We are graced in London with four when really what we want is one good one. We should all be still pushing to see if there is any reorganisation of that structure - if that structure is maintained - and that the Department looks to reviewing that decision.

We also heard - and we welcome I am sure - that the Mayor, the local authorities and other stakeholders will be making a case to protect London's funding. Members will agree with me that we can explore whether or not - in the timescale - we can put in a motion to the Assembly to seek support from the Assembly for this work that is ongoing. I will check the timetable. There is no point us coming up with a motion after the closing date so we will have to explore that. If it is possible it would be good to seek full Assembly Member endorsement of this work. That is as much push as we can get from many people to urge the DfE to listen to what is common sense at best.

Lucy, thank you. There were three key points you made, except I did not get your third one. You talked about strong commissioning and strong accountability. Even though there is dissent about the accountability that you have directly with the DfE, many would think there should be a middle ground somewhere. What was your third point? Do you remember saying a list of three things?

Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark Academy): I am not sure what my third point was.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We have got you on film so we will look. You made three key points there and thank you for that. If you have anything else to say to us then please contact us via Ian [Williamson, Scrutiny Manager, Greater London Authority]. Thank you once again. We will continue our work over this term. We have got two meetings this year. Basically what we will do is look and see what are the key themes that have come out of today's discussion, have a meeting with our new favourite Deputy Mayor and make sure

that whatever we are doing is in sync with her programme again, not wanting to be after the horse has bolted or she has made announcements but can influence, if possible, anything that she is doing. Thank you very much. Thank you.