



City of Westminster

Standards of Education in Westminster & The Future Role of Local Authorities in the School System

An assessment of the Annual Education Report 2010/2011, the future direction of Special Educational Needs and an examination of the changing role of local authorities in education.

**Children, Young People and
Community Protection
Policy & Scrutiny Committee**

January 2011

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Chairman's Introduction



On the 13th December 2011 the Children, Young People and Community Protection P&S Committee met to discuss the Annual Education Report 2010/2011, the future direction of Special Educational Needs and an examination of the changing role of local authorities in education.

There has never been a more important time to examine the relationship between local authorities and the education sector. With fast-moving legislation, the changes will certainly have an impact on what role councils can fulfil in relation to education provision. The Academies Act 2010 and Education Act 2011 have endeavoured to free schools of controls, grant autonomy for leadership teams, remove unnecessary duties and burdens and allowing all schools to choose for themselves how best to develop. However, with this freedom comes critical new roles for local authorities - as strengthened champions of choice, securing a wide range of education options, ensuring there are sufficient high-quality school places, coordinating fair admissions and promoting social justice by supporting vulnerable children and challenging schools which fail to improve.

In our role of challenging schools to achieve improvements, we receive reports such as the Westminster Annual Education Report, where councillors can examine and assess the performance of education providers within the City. In acting as a 'critical friend,' the Children, Young People and Community Protection P&S Committee discussed a number of concerns with Westminster officers, intended to drive performance onwards and upwards. The committee also considered the wider, long-term ambitions for a strategic role for local authorities in education and we invited external experts to provide comment on the latest research into the potential possibilities and difficulties associated with the changes.

Given the theme of the committee, it was thus fitting that the meeting took place at a successful local school, St Marylebone C of E School, and we wish to pass on our sincere thanks to the headteacher, Elizabeth Phillips, for inviting us into her school and taking part in our discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Adams'.

**Cllr Ian Adams,
Chairman of the Children, Young People & Community Protection Policy & Scrutiny Committee**

Key issues highlighted in the discussion

Annual Education Report

General Concerns

- Officers commented that leadership was the single biggest concern in relation to school performance. The committee agreed that **leadership was vital but stressed the importance of governors, as senior management**, as part of the solution to the problem of the gradual retirement of headteachers, which has been a growing national problem. The committee agreed that early identification of middle-management leaders and isolating outstanding deputy heads was fundamental in overcoming the challenges facing leadership in the future.
- The committee was seriously concerned about the significant range across performance figures laid out in the Annual Education Report. The data range across schools in Westminster was very worrying when compared to wider (quoted) overall figures and **the committee stressed that Westminster must ensure that welcome achievement in 'school improvement' does not disguise or neglect the fact that some individual schools are consistently underperforming relative to top-performers**. Councillors highlighted an example of the differences in the levels of **child development** at the end of the 'Early Years' stage where the percentages of pupils achieving a good level of development across some schools were markedly different (23% up to 100%). Councillors also had similar concerns about the ranges across **reading and writing scores at KS1** and **GCSEs**.
- In relation to measuring performance, the committee also requested that a rate of improvement 'school-by-school' should be provided in subsequent reports, in order **to provide clarity and an opportunity to assess performance on a school-by-school basis**. Individual rates of improvements per school, over successive years, would provide a richer picture of progress. The committee also requested that data over a **five-year timescale** be provided, in order to document how a school is performing over time.
- The committee congratulated those involved in achieving the excellent rate of attendance in Westminster and the lowest rate of persistent absence for secondary school pupils in the country, and lower-than-average rates of persistent absence in primary schools across inner London and nationally.

Specific Concerns

- The committee stressed **the importance of communication skills and achievement in the context of early years education**, especially since Westminster results at this stage were below regional and national averages. Acquisition of these skills was imperative because of the consequential impact in later life. The impact of Children's centres therefore needed to be considered.

- The committee was seriously concerned about the disparity in the figures which indicated **a high drop-out rate in post-16 education**. Officers reported that there were complex issues involved in post-16 education and that training and other courses would be an alternative for leavers. However, officers shared members' concern about this. **The committee considered this of sufficient concern to request further data on the issue, alongside London-wide and national data, together with an evaluation of the reasons for the problem.**
- Major national changes are planned in relation to assessment, provision and funding of SEN. A number of local authorities, including Westminster, are working as pathfinders to test out how the new arrangements can be put in place and how stakeholders will be involved. The committee expressed support for Westminster, which was trying to narrow the gap for children in Westminster with special educational needs. **The committee acknowledged the need for inclusive practices and for parents to be offered choice and a range of provision.**

The Changing Role of Local Authorities in Education

- **The 'Soft Lever' of Monitoring Experience / User-Opinion**
Members of the committee commented upon the opportunity for local authorities to have a role in assessing user-experience in the education system. For example, by adopting a 'patient experience' style approach to education, as a soft lever to increase the influence of local authorities in relation to the school system. The example given was a type of 'Trip Advisor' user-feedback system, similar to NHS ratings of GP practices and dental surgeries, to assess how schools were performing their roles. Another member of the committee expressed concern at this type of system, where ratings of education could lead to defamatory comments about local schools or staff. However it was countered that a critical mass of people could balance this out and enable the feedback system to be self-policing.
- **Different models: Shared Services**
There was discussion of sharing back office services, following consideration of reference in the LGiU research of innovative practice by councils (e.g. shared educational psychologists and mutuals / social enterprises). Members noted that reductions in funding had resulted in schools losing spending power, and that schools were looking to reduce the impact of limited resources by seeking economies of scale and shared buying power. It was seen as a positive thing that different models were emerging and sharing services (as with triborough arrangements) could work well. However, concern was expressed about the hidden costs of providing services via different models. It was acknowledged that councils could establish even more types of joint ventures and become the brokering organisation which legislation envisioned.

- **Democratic links**
Members highlighted the democratic problem presented by changes in the education system, as power was effectively being centralised and moved away from local control when schools converted to Academies. Laurie Thraves (LGiU) contended that Members have become more important as advocates on behalf of local communities and the challenge was for Members to provide links between education and local democratic government.
- **Admissions Arrangements**
Members were concerned that councils would no longer be able to regulate competition between local schools and ensure fair access to school places, and that the City Council's power would weaken as more maintained schools became Academies.
- **Primary Schools**
Members also discussed the number of primary schools which were considering changing status. The current level of conversions of primary schools was reported to be fewer than 10% at the moment but the numbers of those changing was recently more pronounced. It was reported that primary schools were always going to lag behind secondary schools in relation to conversion, but the pace of change could be more dramatic. In relation to faith schools, the Headteacher of St Marylebone C of E School reported that moving to become an academy was an incredibly expensive process for these types of school and this should not be dismissed when assessing changes.
- **“Levers like ‘rubber’”**
Members of the committee also raised concerns about the new ‘soft levers’ available to local authorities. It was thought that even though local authorities were being granted a fair amount of discretion in the strong strategic role that they would be providing, the legislative changes were ‘knotty.’ In this way, local authorities might not end up with the powers that they originally thought they could exercise and thus compensate for this through local authority partnerships.

Context - The Standards of Education in Westminster

- 1.1 In 2009 Westminster City Council established an independent Education Commission to look at ways to improve the educational achievement of Westminster's children and young people. The final report of this Commission made ten key recommendations and was published in September 2009.
- 1.2 One of the ten recommendations was that an **Annual Education Report** should be produced to provide an overview of education in Westminster and the standards of achievement being reached. The second in the series of these annual reports was presented to the Children, Young People & Community Protection Policy and Scrutiny Committee on the 13th December 2011 and formed the basis for much of the discussion that is summarised in this document. A full copy of the Annual Education Report can be found on the website for this committee.
- 1.3 Since the Education Commission published its report in 2009, the national financial and policy context has changed dramatically. The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, was published in November 2010 outlining a programme of reform including freeing schools from central Government direction and unnecessary duties and processes; powers for teachers to improve discipline; changes to the school curriculum and how it is assessed; more academies and free schools; changing the role of local authorities and changes to the funding system including a new pupil premium. The **Education Act 2011**, which received Royal Assent on the 15th November 2011, took forward the legislative proposals in the White Paper to promote local decision-making in schools.
- 1.4 Following the formation of the coalition government, the Academies Bill was also introduced in Parliament, which allowed all schools to apply for academy status. A Department for Education press notice on 5th September 2011 reported that there was an increase of 1,097 academies in the previous 12 months of which 981 had used the conversion route in the **Academies Act 2010**. A further 575 schools were in the academies pipeline. There are 29 local authorities out of the 151 with responsibility for education, where the majority of secondary schools are now academies.
- 1.5 At the local authority level, Westminster City Council has agreed to implement shared education services with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. In light of developments, it is clear that the resources available and the role accorded to the local authority in relation to education provision will continue to change in the future.

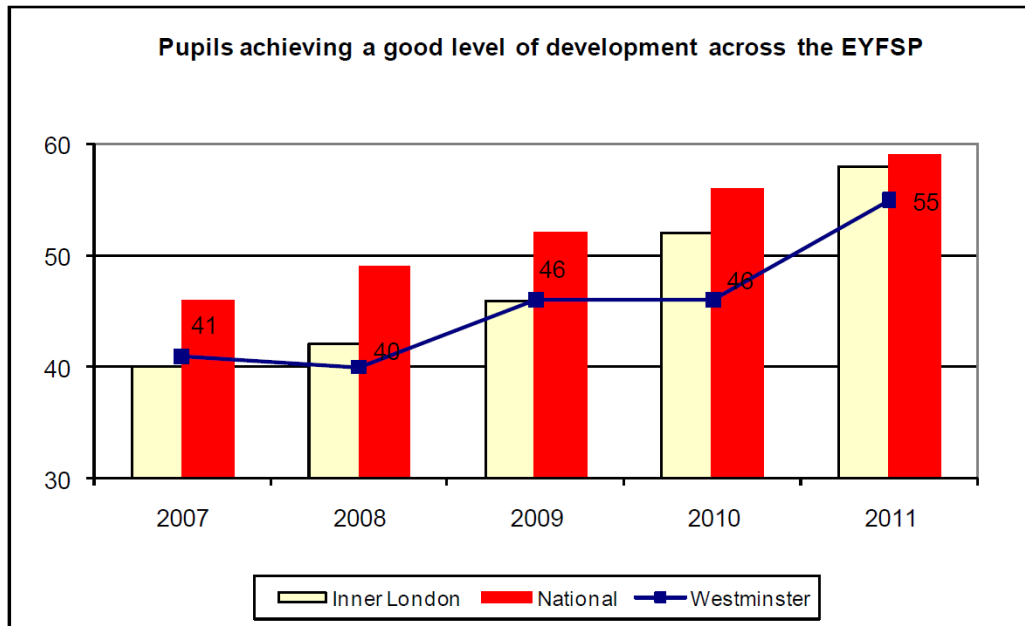
Westminster Annual Education Report

2.1 Officers of Westminster City Council presented the committee with a copy of the Annual Education Report 2010/2011 and the committee heard the results and outcomes from the current reporting year. The key messages around achievement for 2010/11 were:

- **Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage had increased significantly and the gap with the national averages had now narrowed.**
- **At Key Stage 2, Westminster continued to achieve above the national averages.**
- **GCSE attainment had continued to improve at the expected rate.**
- **Post 16 attainment had fallen and was a concern.**

2.2 Early Years Foundation:

Officers reported that levels of achievement were generally good, with 55% of children attaining a good level of development by age 5. Officers reported that, more significantly, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of pupils and the rest of Westminster was continuing to narrow. This was reported to be lower than the national achievement gap. There was an acknowledgement that language issues continued to affect achievement in early year's settings. Officers highlighted the importance of early intervention and programmes such as 'Every Child a Talker' designed to help.

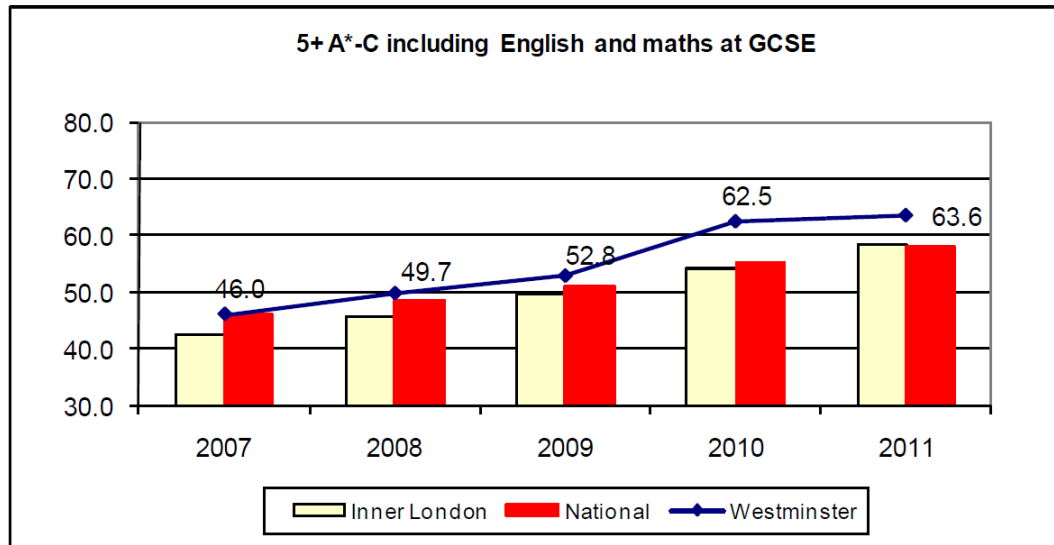


2.3 Key Stages 1 and 2:

Officers highlighted that Westminster pupils were generally achieving in line with inner London averages for all subjects at KS1 but below national averages. It was also reported that achievement in English and Mathematics at KS2 remained at the same level as in 2010, which was above both the inner London and national averages.

2.4 GCSE

It was reported that achievement in Westminster's schools at secondary level was well above both the inner London and national averages. Officers raised concerns about the subject of Mathematics in schools and stated the need to attract and develop mathematics teachers.

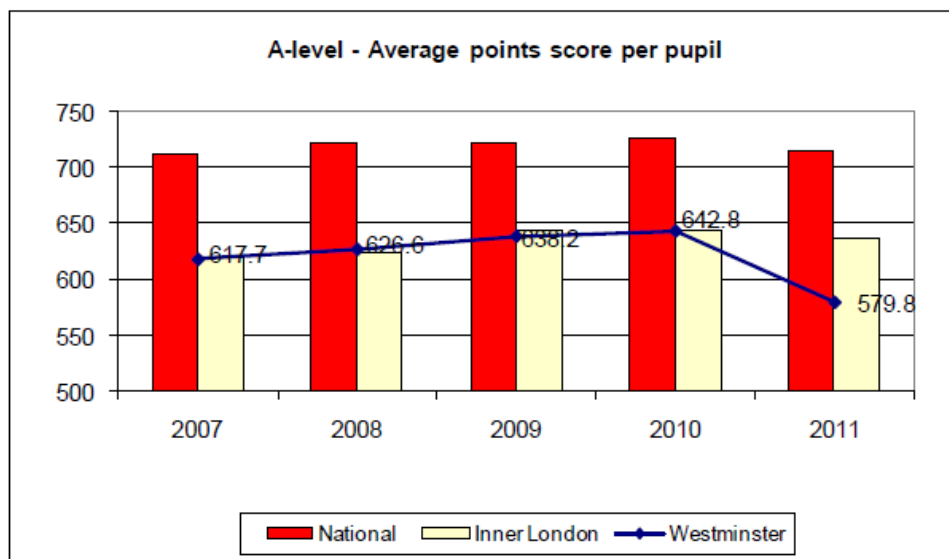


2.5 Post 16:

Officers noted that the average score per pupil had fallen over the last year, and that performance (*based on the average point score per pupil and per entry*) was well below the inner London and national averages.

Average point score per pupil:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Westminster	617.7	626.6	638.2	642.8	579.8
Inner London	618.8	24.6	644.1	642.8	637.6
National	711.2	721.1	721.1	726.5	715.3



2.6 Special Educational Needs

As of January 2011 Westminster was responsible for meeting the educational needs of 875 children for whom it held a statement. Of these children:

- 470 attended maintained mainstream schools, early year's settings or Academies
- 40 were educated within resourced provision or SEN units within mainstream schools
- 210 attended maintained special schools
- 110 attended non-maintained special schools
- 4 attended hospital schools
- 41 were educated other than in school

Officers reported that the number of children with SEN within Westminster was double the national average and this year was the biggest cohort.

However, it was reported that children and young people with SEN in Westminster were making good progress. Westminster officers were looking to address gaps in provision and work with triborough partners to assess the cost and efficiencies of provision. It was reported that the SEN pathfinder had recently started.

Committee Discussions and Concerns

General Concerns

- 3.1 Officers commented that leadership was the single biggest concern in relation to school performance. The committee agreed that leadership was vital but stressed the importance of governors, as senior management, as part of the

solution to the problem of the gradual retirement of headteachers, which has been a growing national problem. The committee agreed that early identification of middle-management leaders and isolating outstanding deputy heads was fundamental in overcoming the challenges facing leadership in the future.

- 3.2 The committee was seriously concerned about the significant range across performance figures laid out in the Annual Education Report. The data range across schools in Westminster was very worrying when compared to wider (quoted) overall figures and the committee stressed that Westminster must ensure that welcome achievement in 'school improvement' does not disguise or neglect the fact that some individual schools are consistently underperforming relative to top-performers. Councillors highlighted an example of the differences in the levels of child development at the end of the 'Early Years' stage where the percentages of pupils achieving a good level of development across some schools were markedly different (23% up to 100%). Councillors also had similar concerns about the ranges across reading and writing scores at KS1 and GCSEs.
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- 3.7 Major national changes are planned in relation to assessment, provision and funding of SEN. A number of local authorities, including Westminster, are working as pathfinders to test out how the new arrangements can be put in place and how stakeholders will be involved. The committee expressed support for Westminster, which was trying to narrow the gap for children in Westminster with special educational needs. The committee acknowledged the need for inclusive practices and for parents to be offered choice and a range of provision.

The Changing Role of Local Authorities in Education

- 4.1 In the *Importance of Teaching, the Schools White Paper* 2010, the government reported that they wanted to reflect the known benefits of school autonomy, which had been established beyond doubt. In a school system with good quality teachers, flexibility in the curriculum and clearly established accountability measures, the government considered that it logically followed that devolving as much day-to-day decision-making as possible to the front line would result in innovation and raised standards.
- 4.2 The government considered that the ability of schools to decide their own ethos and chart their own destiny had been severely constrained by government guidance, Ministerial interference and increasing levels of bureaucracy. While Academies and City Technology Colleges (CTCs) had taken advantage of greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards, these freedoms were considered to have been curtailed. It was also deemed that it was virtually impossible to establish a new state-funded school without local authority support, despite international evidence, which pointed to a '*galvanising effect on the whole school system of allowing new entrants in areas where parents are dissatisfied with what is available*' (DfE, 2010, p.11)
- 4.3 The government made a decision that they wanted every school to be able to shape '*its own character, frame its own ethos and develop its own specialisms, free of either central or local bureaucratic constraint*' (DfE, 2010, p.12). The government's ambition, therefore, was to help every school which wanted 'greater freedom' to achieve Academy status. It was acknowledged that some schools would not want to acquire Academy status and other schools would not have the capacity to enjoy Academy freedoms without financial support. However the government had planned that the direction of travel would be towards all schools as '*autonomous institutions collaborating with each other on terms set by teachers, not bureaucrats*' (DfE, 2010, p.12).
- 4.4 The government then set out a list of key aspirations in relation to the freedom of schools:

- To increase freedom and autonomy for all schools, removing unnecessary duties and burdens, and allowing all schools to choose for themselves how best to develop.
 - To restore for all Academies the freedoms they originally had while continuing to ensure a level playing field on admissions particularly in relation to children with Special Educational Needs.
 - To ensure that the lowest performing schools, attaining poorly and in an Ofsted category or not improving, would be considered for conversion to become Academies to effect educational transformation.
 - To dramatically extend the Academies programme, opening it up to all schools
 - To ensure that there would be support for schools increasingly to collaborate through Academy chains and multi-school trusts and federations.
 - To support teachers and parents to set up new Free Schools to meet parental demand, especially in areas of deprivation.
- 4.5 Crucially the government insisted that local authorities should be given a strong *strategic* role as champions for parents, families and vulnerable pupils. Specifically, local authorities would have a duty to promote educational excellence by ensuring a good supply of high quality school places, co-ordinating fair admissions and developing their own school improvement strategies to support local schools.

Committee Discussion on the Future Role of Local Government in the School System

- 4.6 As part of the committee's discussions, the Chairman of the committee invited a representative from the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) to speak on the topic, in relation to a recent piece of quantitative research on the future of local government's role in the school system. In the research, conducted over the summer of 2011 in partnership with UNISON and the NUT, it was found that two-fifths of Lead Members for Children's Services and Directors of Children's Services across England believed that 80 per cent or more of secondary schools in their area would choose to convert to academy status within three years.
- 4.7 The LGiU research also found that local councillors and officers in charge of education are not confident that councils will be able to perform the crucial role of 'strong, strategic champions' under current arrangements, because there are concerns of how 'strategic' local authorities will be able to be and the feasibility of the provision of school support services.

- 4.8 Laurie Thraves (Policy Manager, Local Government Information Unit) introduced the research by highlighting the headline challenges to local authorities' roles in education due to the widespread shifts to Academy status. Local authorities were seen to be given a more vital, strategic role in education; specifically around finance and support services. Formerly provided support services could now be provided through commissioning charities, the private sector and employee mutuals. Given the change in profile of local authorities, the **key levers** of services provided to the school system would be reduced in a pronounced way. Of particular concern would be the cost of traded services, supporting SEN provision and economies of scale in providing services.
- 4.9 The Policy Manager reported that the LGiU research findings highlighted the importance of the branding of support services and providing Academies with a whole 'menu of services' for purchase. The onus would then be on the local authorities to choose how these would be sold and how they would drive revenue when the local authority is no longer the monopoly provider.
- 4.10 Despite the absence of formal statutory powers, it was reported that there would still be a range of **'soft levers'** that local authorities could use. For example, in relation to governor support, the power of the local was far from peripheral and authorities would have continuing influence in the future. Authorities would also have a role in presenting information and challenging schools to improve. Whilst the 'hard levers' would no longer be there, councils could use high quality information as a 'soft lever' when working with education providers.
- 4.11 In conclusion, the LGiU representative told the committee that local government's role would be changing from a type of hard leadership of the school system, to a more soft, influencing and brokering leadership role – but one where local authorities could still have a major impact.

Committee Discussion

5.1 The 'Soft Lever' of Monitoring Experience / User-Opinion

Members of the committee commented upon the opportunity for local authorities to have a role in assessing user-experience in the education system. For example, by adopting a 'patient experience' style approach to education, as a soft lever to increase the influence of local authorities in relation to the school system. The example given was a type of 'Trip Advisor' user-feedback system, similar to NHS ratings of GP practices and dental surgeries, to assess how schools were performing their roles. Another member of the committee expressed concern at this type of system, where ratings of education could lead to defamatory comments about local schools or staff. However it was countered that a critical mass of people could balance this out and enable the feedback system to be self-policing.

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Source Documents and Background Papers

Westminster Annual Education Report 2010/2011

<http://is.gd/WAER11>

Department for Education (2010) The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper CM 7980 [London: TSO]

<http://is.gd/CM7980>

EdComs & London Councils (2011) The Changing Education Environment in London – a School's Perspective [London: London Councils]

<http://is.gd/LondonEducation>

LGiU (2011) The Future of Local Government's Role in the School System

<http://is.gd/LGiUFuture>

London Councils (2011) Education Bill - 2nd Reading Debate Briefing [London: London Councils]

<http://is.gd/LondonCouncilsEdBill>