

Hillingdon Education Partnership Review – Progress Update July 2021

Executive Summary

Isos Partnership were commissioned by Schools Strategic Partnership Board to undertake a review of current education partnership working and explore options for future models. The review is being overseen by a Steering Group made up of all key partners. We have summarised below the main messages from the survey responses received and workshops and interviews we have held with Heads and local authority officers.

Overall messages

- There was a positive response about the future of the partnership with 86% of respondents being very interested or interested in stronger partnership working
- School Improvement and SEND were the top two choices for areas the partnership should focus on followed by Inclusion and Behaviour and Early Help and Intervention
- There was less positive feedback about current partnership working with the majority of respondents (66%) saying partnership working was somewhat effective

Strengths of current partnership working

- Secondary schools were positive about much of the support from HASH.
- Primary Heads were also positive about the opportunities to collaborate and support each other through Primary Forum
- There was recognition from some Heads that the local authority capacity to support schools had increased over the last year and support for regular information sharing
- Support from LLEs was viewed positively by most schools that had received support

Challenges identified included:

- There was a lack of clarity about the role of Schools' Strategic Partnership Board, its priorities and how it fits with other groups such as Schools Forum and SEND Board
- There was broader confusion about partnership structures and where to go for support and concerns about the representation of Heads on different groups
- There was concern about the patchiness of the support offer and collaboration and about the support available to all schools to support improvement
- There were also frustrations expressed about the willingness of all schools to work in partnership and about the commitment of the Local Authority to the partnership

Conditions for strengthening partnership working in future:

- A clear and simple set of agreed priorities that drive work across the partnership
- Partnership structures that engage a wider group of Heads in taking work forward
- Independent leadership of the partnership and capacity to drive forward the work
- Funding to support the partnership from both the local authority and schools
- Developing a more differentiated partnership offer
- Sustaining and developing the capacity for more school-to-school support

Next Steps: We would like to present and discuss these initial findings with all schools at the event on the 15th of September and share examples from other local education partnerships that might help inform the debate about where you go next and how best to move forward.

Background to the review

Isos Partnership were commissioned by the Schools' Strategic Partnership Board to undertake a review of current education partnership working and explore options for future models to help develop a well-structured and sustainable education partnership that can secure better educational outcomes for children and young people within the borough.

The work of the review is being overseen and managed by a Steering Group with the following membership representing the different groups within the current education partnership:

- Nigel Clemens (HASH)
- Duncan Greig (Primary Forum)
- Andrew Wilcock (LLE Group)
- Abi Preston (Head of Education Improvement and Partnerships, Local Authority)
- Adrian Percival (Strategic Education Lead, Local Authority)

What have we done so far?

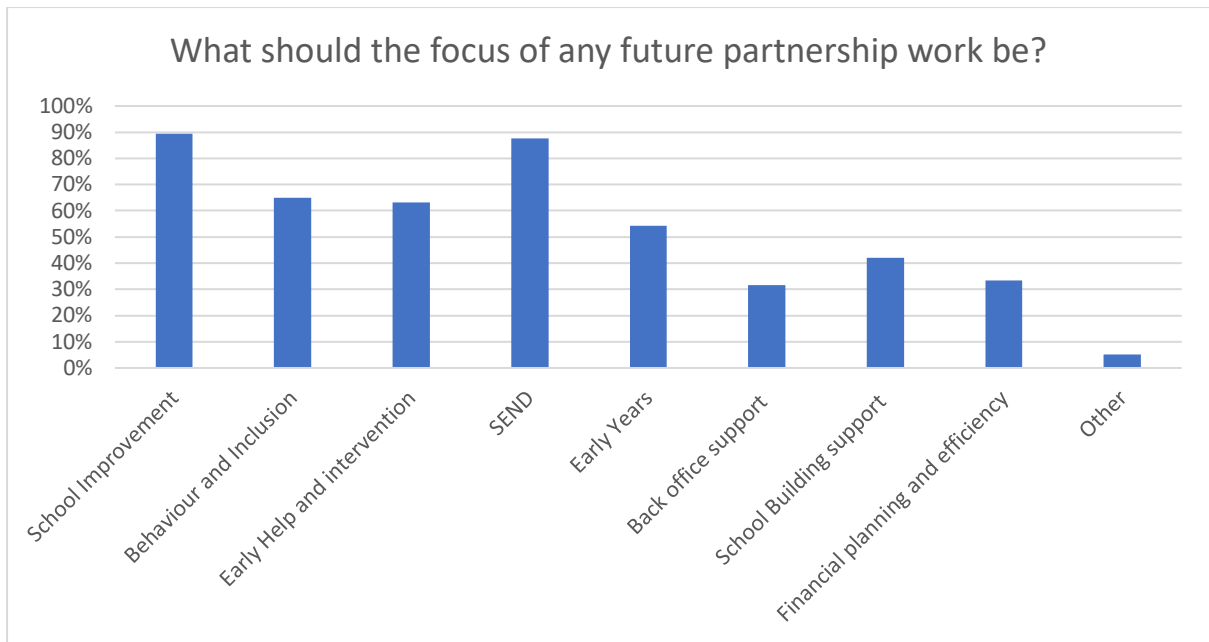
Thank you to all of you who took the time to complete the survey and/or speak to us to give us your views. We received 58 completed survey responses in total - 52 came from Heads/Principals, 2 from Executive Heads or CEOs, 3 from Deputy or Assistant Heads, and 1 from a Chair of Governors. Responses broke down between phases as 13 Secondary, 42 Primary and 3 Special with 39 responses from maintained schools and 19 from academies.

In addition to the survey responses, we have held workshops or discussions with a small number of secondary, primary and special school Heads as well as local authority officers. We have been working with the Steering Group to reflect on the messages shared so far and explore what further work should be undertaken.

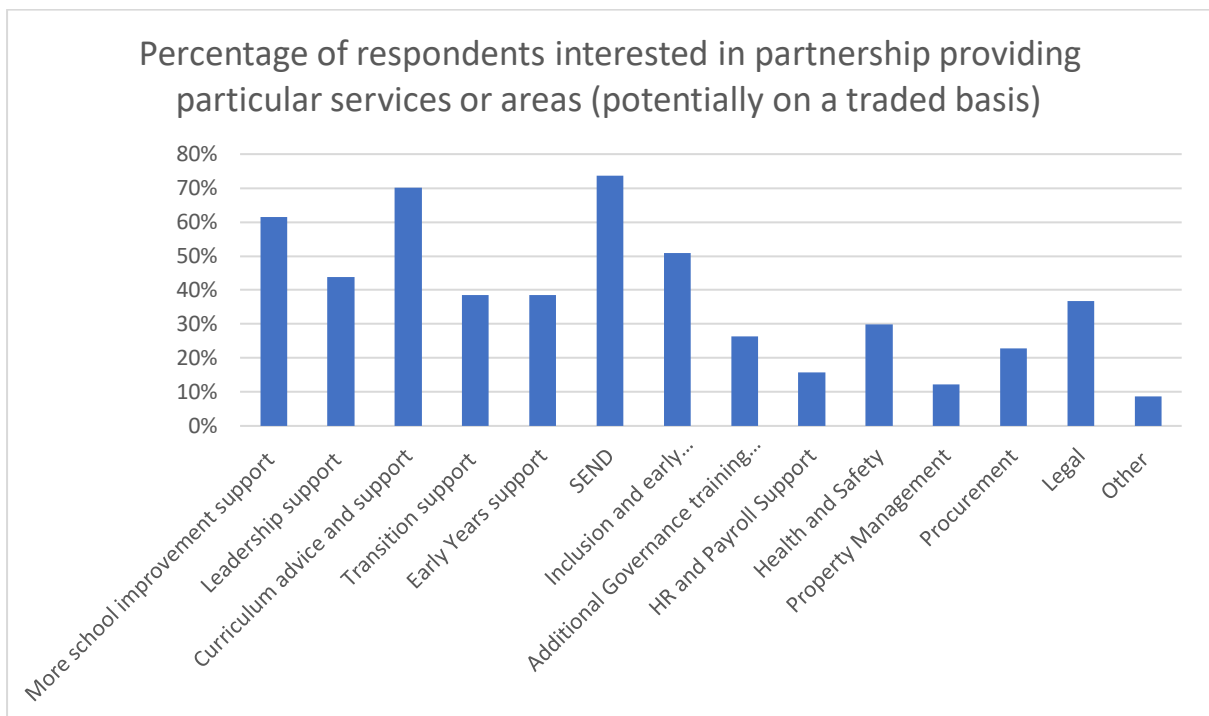
What have the main messages been?

There was positive interest from respondents to the survey in stronger partnership working in future. 48% of respondents were very interested in stronger partnership working in future, 38% were interested and 12% were somewhat interested.

The survey also tested the areas that respondents thought any future partnership offer should focus on. The chart below shows responses on this question with school improvement and SEND being the top two choices and Behaviour and Inclusion Support and Early Help and Intervention the next most popular areas.



We also asked about any particular services or areas of support that schools would be interested in the partnership providing (potentially on a traded basis). SEND, Curriculum Advice and Support and School Improvement Support were the top three choices here.



Responses to the survey were less positive about the effectiveness and impact of current partnership working with the majority (66%) of survey respondents saying partnership working was only somewhat effective in supporting education and school improvement. 22% thought it was not effective at all. We also asked about the impact of current partnership working with 10% saying partnership working was having very high or high impact, 52% thought it was having some impact and 31% said it was having no impact at all.

In the rest of this section, we explore further views on the strengths of the current partnership offer, areas where it was working less well and suggestions for how we might consider strengthening partnership working in future.

Feedback from the survey and interviews with schools identified a number of strengths in the way the current system works and the offer of support to schools including:

- **Secondary schools were positive about the support from HASH** especially the support provided pre-COVID such as the peer review programme and senior leadership internships. They were seen as encouraging positive collaboration between schools and many were keen to get back to doing them again post-COVID.
- **Primary Heads were also positive about the opportunities to collaborate and support each other through Primary Forum** and some identified local networks and clusters where they were working with other primary schools as particularly helpful as well (although these were not seen as systematic across the borough).
- **There was recognition from some Heads that the local authority capacity to support schools had increased** over the last year and positive feedback about the support provided from advisers to some schools. There was also positive feedback about the more regular information updates that have been shared with schools during the last year.
- **Support from LLEs was also commented on positively by schools that have received support** with two thirds saying it had been very effective or effective. There were also positive comments about the range of CPD from teaching schools and belief that there are some excellent models already that could be developed more widely.
- **Specific projects and initiatives that were commented on as strengths included:** HASH Peer Review, EYFS Partnership, Collaborative working as the Deanery, Peer Review amongst Catholic Schools, Local Clusters, pre-pandemic use of other schools as alternative to exclusion, writing moderation, SLT internships

Feedback from the survey and interviews also identified areas where the current system was working less well or where Heads saw a need for an improved offer moving forward:

- **There was a lack of clarity about the role of Schools' Strategic Partnership Board, its priorities and how it fits with other groups.** Only 22% of respondents were very clear or clear about its role and priorities, 38% were somewhat clear and 34% not clear at all. One member of the Board commented that they still struggle to see how SSPB fits with other groups such as School Forum and HASH. Another thought SSPB should have a different and wider role with the funding to match.
- **There was broader confusion about partnership structures and where to go for support.** Some respondents said they were confused about how the multiple partnership structures – SSPB, Schools Forum, SEND Board and Heads Groups - all fitted together. There was also confusion about where support was coming from - some knew there was lots out there but didn't know how to access it. Others said they had always been confused about where to go for support. Some saw the LEAP website as being the answer in future but said there was not enough awareness yet.
- **There were concerns about representation of Heads on different groups.** Some said partnership working was not transparent and it wasn't clear how partnerships were

derived or how people were chosen for roles and whether they had the right skills for the role. There was a desire expressed to widen the range of schools involved and to get below the level of Heads in promoting collaboration between schools.

- **There was concern about the patchiness of the support offer and collaboration.** Some said that school-to-school support can be effective but it depends too much on schools reaching out themselves and having their own links, and they worried about some Heads being left out and schools being isolated. At primary level, there was concern that some schools were part of strong local networks but there was no systematic approach to schools working together on specific priorities or in localities.
- **There were concerns about the support available to all schools to support improvement.** Whilst schools understood the LA's new approach to assessing risk and many welcomed being classified as a self-improving school, they felt there was still a lack of clarity about where support for schools moving from good to great was coming from and too little contact with these schools. Some said there was a lack of understanding still about academies role and how the LA should relate to them.
- **There were frustrations about the willingness of all schools to work in partnership and the need for the Local Authority to confirm its commitment to the partnership.** Some complained that despite attempts to reach out and engage with other local schools they were too busy to engage with partnership opportunities. There was also frustration with historic changes of local authority personnel that were seen as making it hard to build an effective working relationship and schools wanted to see more visible signs of the borough's ongoing commitment to the partnership.

We have also heard a number of messages about what would need to be in place to make partnership working more effective in future:

- **A clear and simple set of agreed priorities** that drive a programme of work across the partnership and all partners involved. Schools felt that these priorities should be driven by analysis of current performance across the borough and feedback from them about their needs and priorities for support. As noted above survey respondents thought these priorities should be wide-ranging and encompass areas such as SEND and inclusion as well as school improvement support.
- **Partnership structures that engage a wider group of Heads in taking work forward.** This might involve sub-groups of SSPB or time-limited task-and finish groups being asked to take work forward. There was a desire to bring in more Heads and schools who might have relevant expertise and experience to share into these groups.
- **Independent leadership of the partnership and capacity to drive forward the work.** Some thought an Independent Chair for SSPB would be helpful to establish clearly that this is a partnership between the LA and schools, not led by one or the other. There was also recognition that some form of co-ordinating capacity is needed to drive work forward across the partnership, and the absence of this capacity had stymied previous efforts to strengthen partnership working across the borough.
- **Funding to support the partnership from both the local authority and schools.** We heard a strong message that both the local authority and schools should be contributing to meeting the costs of partnership working if this was to work. This review was a good example of sharing the costs between partners and that principle should be applied to the costs of partnership working moving forward. More

detailed modelling should be undertaken to look at costs and to develop proposals about the different levels of contributions from all partners to meet those costs.

- **Developing a more differentiated partnership offer.** Some schools talked about having a more basic offer which hopefully all schools would want to sign up for that would keep them in touch with the partnership and provide basic information and advice to all schools. For schools that wanted it and were willing to pay more, they would have access to a more extensive offer shaped by them.
- **Sustaining and developing the capacity for more school-to-school support.** Given the formal end of Teaching Schools, there was concern from some about how to sustain the capacity (and build more of it) for system leadership and the roles that LLEs and SLEs (or equivalents) could play in supporting schools moving forward. This was one of the areas that might require sustained funding from any partnership.

What are we planning to do next?

We would like to present and discuss these initial findings with all schools at the event on the 15th of September. We would also like to use that event to share examples from other local education partnerships that might help inform the debate about where you go next. We would also like to spend some time then discussing and debating the conditions we have identified above for more effective partnership working and discussing whether you agree with these, whether there are other areas we need to consider and if you agree how best you might move forward to put these in place over the next academic year.

Isos Partnership, July 2021