

# Children and Young People Select Committee Report tabled at the meeting

Wednesday, 4 February 2015  
7.30 pm, Committee Rooms 1 & 2  
Civic Suite  
Lewisham Town Hall  
London SE6 4RU

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## Part 1

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## **Local Authority intervention in Sedgehill School: a report for LBL Children & Young People Select Committee from the perspective of the Governing Body**

**4<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

### **1.0 Purpose of this report**

To provide the committee with the Governing Body's perspective on the Local Authority's intervention at Sedgehill School

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 The Governing Body (GB) of Sedgehill School was stood down on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015. The author and presenters of this report do not currently hold any position of governance at Sedgehill School. The report refers to events leading up to the establishment of an Interim Executive Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.

2.2 The author, Ms Magda Moorey, became Chair of Governors on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014. Dr Mike Thomas was the Chair of Governors for the 2013-14 academic year and up to 23<sup>rd</sup> October. Ms Maxine Haffner, also in attendance, was a Parent Governor at Sedgehill throughout this period.

### **3.0 The Scope of this report**

3.1 An email was received from Cllr Paschoud on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2014 requesting that the Chair of Governors attend a meeting of the Select Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014. The purpose was given as being to address two questions:

*a) how the Council has interacted with Sedgehill School (governors, staff, parents etc), from the start of the Autumn term to the present, to identify and then resolve any problems perceived with progress the school and pupils were/are making, including when and by whom key communications and decisions were made during that period;*  
*and*

*b) what plans the Council now has (by 4th February) to ensure that results achieved by pupils at Sedgehill in Summer 2015 and beyond will be better than they would have been if such interventions had not been made, and how we will be able to measure the success of what has been 'promised' as a result of the intervention.*

It was suggested that

*“a member of what may by then be the former governing body of the school can help us to understand events from their point of view”*

3.2 In preparation for this committee the author has been provided with a copy of the report prepared by The Director of Children's Services (DCS).

#### **4.0 Communication between the LA and the Governing Body prior to the 2014 results**

4.1 The Chair of Governors briefed Governors that he had met with the DCS in the summer term where concerns about the school's progress had been raised. The 2014 exam results were understood to be an important milestone in deciding any future intervention. The option and consequence of receiving a warning letter from the LA was understood by the Chair and Vice-Chairs.

#### **5.0 Communication following the 2014 results**

5.1 Dr Thomas met with the DCS along with the Executive Principal and the Head Teacher in late August 2014 to discuss the very disappointing examination results. A further meeting with the DCS, the Chair and two vice chairs took place on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September. There was general agreement that the results were very disappointing (as they were in many schools across Lewisham and the country) and that there would need to be a strengthening of the school's capacity in order to secure improvement in the future for the 2015 cohort and beyond. The DCS presented arguments as to why the model of school improvement provided by Hayes School since 2012 was no longer thought to be sufficient and why a more direct intervention in the school was necessary. She invited Governors to visit Bethnal Green Academy (BGA) and described a governance model of sponsored academy. It was suggested that immediate support could be achieved by the existing Governing Body inviting BGA into the school with immediate effect with a medium term consideration and consultation on becoming a formal partner as a sponsored academy. The advantage of this approach was described as speed of implementation, giving maximum time to influence 2015 performance. Governors were encouraged to visit BGA as soon as possible. A visit to BGA was set up for week beginning 15<sup>th</sup> September for the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors.

5.2 Ms Sue Tipler, Head of School Improvement and Standards, attended a Governing Body meeting at the school on 26<sup>th</sup> September and presented the LA's concerns regarding the school's current performance and rate of improvement. There was discussion of the outcome of a visit that was undertaken on the fourth day of term which Ms Tipler argued had not provided assurance to support the school's claims that the current Year 11 were on track to achieve 65% GCSE A\*-C including English and Maths. The school felt that the report misrepresented the school's position and the discussion that had taken place with school staff during that visit.

5.3 At the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September the Chair reported to the Board that the DCS had told him that the options for Sedgehill were to engage in-borough sponsored support, external sponsored support or maintain the status quo; the last option would trigger the LA issuing a Warning Notice. It was suggested that the invitation for

support to come in to Sedgehill could be made as Chair's action in the best interests of the school. Dr Thomas reported that he wanted to use existing governance processes and saw this as a decision that needed to be made by the whole governing body considering all available options. Within a week of this discussion the LA had developed their position to identify BGA as their preferred provider of support to Sedgehill.

5.4 The Governors resolved to reassure the LA that the school was looking to protect the Year 11 cohort. They would undertake further exploration of the BGA and other support options. A joint Achievement, Teaching and Learning committee would be convened on 30 September 2014 to consider the 2014 results, what lessons could be learnt and to agree a recovery plan. The Chair contacted the LA to request a detailed options paper presenting the pros and cons of each support option and its impact on the school. The Executive Head Teacher consulted with the London Reference Group to gain further insight into the performance of London schools in this very volatile set of 2014 results.

5.5 A further meeting took place between the DCS, Head of School Improvement, the Chair and two Vice Chairs of Sedgehill on 7<sup>th</sup> October. At this meeting there was further discussion about the possible routes to securing additional support. It was re-confirmed that all governors would be involved in decision making and that full information needed to be available to them to be able to evaluate the merits of each option. The request from the Chair for an option appraisal from the LA was acknowledged by the DCS by email. No written advice on the relative merits of the options available was received from the LA by the Governing Body.

5.6 An extraordinary meeting of the GB was held on 16<sup>th</sup> October at which governors considered the support options proposed by BGA and Challenge Partners. (The school was already an existing member of the Challenge Partners network and had a Memorandum of Understanding with Hayes School to work together on areas of school improvement. The proposals submitted by Challenge Partners at this meeting were different in scope and intensity and involved Hayes' Executive Head, Kieran Osborne, having a substantial role as Executive Principal of Sedgehill). Mark Keary, Principal of BGA and Kieran Osborne, representing Challenge Partners, presented and answered questions from members.

5.7 An extraordinary meeting of the GB took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> October to come to a decision. The DCS attended this meeting and reiterated her concerns re Sedgehill's performance and capacity to improve. She stated that the BGA offer was her preferred option and made it clear to governors that a rejection of her advice would result in her issuing a warning notice.

5.8 The Governing Body agreed by majority decision to secure support from Challenge Partners.

5.8 Dr Thomas sent a brief communication to the DCS to inform her of the decision of the meeting .

5.9 Dr Thomas had indicated at the beginning of term that he was unable to continue as Chair of Governors. Magda Moorey was confirmed as the Chair of Governors with immediate effect.

## **6.0 Communication of the Warning Notice**

6.1 A warning notice was received by the Chair of Governors on 24<sup>th</sup> October without further communication with the DCS

6.2 The Chair of Governors, Executive Principal and Head Teacher asked to meet with the DCS to discuss a way forward. This meeting took place on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2014. The Chair of Governors asked for the DCS to consider arrangements for Challenge Partners to provide improvement support for the remainder of the academic year and to work with the school on an Improvement Board to monitor progress. If this approach did not result in an improved position in the 2015 results then school leadership would expect a radical intervention from the LA. This approach was rejected by the DCS. The Chair of Governors confirmed that the Governors would be contesting the warning notice and would be submitting evidence to Ofsted. The DCS again suggested that an invitation from the Chair to BGA to provide support immediately would ensure that the improvement support would be available quickly. The Chair reiterated her position that this did not constitute a matter which could be undertaken through Chair's action. (This would need to be a matter that was so urgent that it could not wait for a meeting to be called and the Chair would expect to have the decision endorsed by the full GB; it was the Chair's view that any invitation would be highly unlikely to be endorsed by the GB).

## **7.0 Communication following Ofsted's confirmation of the Warning Notice**

7.1 The Chair of Governors was informed on 1<sup>st</sup> December that the Governing Body's contesting of the warning notice had not succeeded and that Ofsted had upheld the notice. The communication stated that the consideration had been whether intervention was justified. It did not express a view as to the relative merits of the proposed intervention.

7.2 Governors received a letter from Sue Tipler on 2<sup>nd</sup> December stating that the LA were minded to apply to the DfE for powers to appoint an Interim Executive Board. Governors were asked to regard the letter as a formal consultation on this intention and were given until 12<sup>th</sup> December to submit a response. The LA indicated to the

Chair of Governors that they would want to progress matters at speed to ensure that new arrangements were in place at the start of the Spring term. The Chair of Governors confirmed that the Governing Body would be submitting a formal response, following its own consultation with staff and parents. Up to this point the Governors had followed the LA advice that a wider discussion of the school's position and the issuing of a warning notice would be damaging to the reputation of the school and its leadership. There had been a reasonable expectation that the warning notice would not be upheld. However, once Ofsted had upheld the notice Governors agreed that the position of the school and the action of the LA should be shared with the school's stakeholders. The Governors placed a letter on the school website outlining the position of the school and inviting parents to attend a meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December to give Governors the opportunity to explain the position, to take questions and to hear parents' views.

7.3 The DCS emailed the Chair of Governors to state that if the warning notice was being discussed with parents, the LA should be present. The Chair of Governors said that this would not be appropriate as it was a school meeting rather than a public meeting and its primary purpose was for Governors to meet with parents.

7.4 The Governors submitted their representation to the DfE on 11<sup>th</sup> November. This included detailed appendices of the views of parents and staff of Sedgehill. It has not been possible to gain a definitive response on when the application by the LA was actually submitted to the DfE. The Chair of Governors attended the office of the DCS in person on 11<sup>th</sup> November in order to sign the application, confirm that the Governors had been consulted and to indicate that they did not support the application. The Head of Standards requested information at this time on the INSET arrangements at the start of the term and confirmed the names of the Deputy Heads.

## **8.0 Communication following the DfE's indication that they would not be making a decision until after the new year**

8.1 On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2014 the Chair of Governors received a telephone call from the DCS stating that a decision would not be taken by the DfE until after the Christmas recess. Given this further adjustment to timescales she said that BGA no longer felt that any support to the school in the current academic year would be deliverable. She assured the Chair that the LA would give the school and the current Head Teacher every support in securing strengthened leadership capacity in January but also confirmed that the application to put an IEB in place would not be withdrawn.

8.2 The Chair of Governors was informed of the DfE's confirmation of the LA's application on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2015. Governors received a letter from the Head of School Improvement and Standards on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015 informing them that they

would be stood down on 22<sup>nd</sup> January and the IEB would take over the governance of the school from 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015

## 9.0 Conclusions

9.1 The LA had expressed its concerns about performance and capacity to improve during the Summer term 13-14. A School Improvement visit which took place in the first week of term resulted in a contested report and the LA saying that they had received insufficient assurance that the school was on track to meet its 2015 target of 65% A\*-C incl E&M

9.2 Following the poor performance in 2014 Year 11 exams the DCS suggested that the Chair of Governors should invite an Executive Head to join the school to strengthen leadership. By the first week of September the LA had identified as Mark Keary from BGA as suitable support. The Chair of Governors rejected the notion of Chair's Action to effect change and instead instigated a full exploration of the options available to the school.

9.3 The DCS made it very clear to Governors that if they did not follow her advice she would lose confidence in the Governors' leadership as well as the leadership of the school to effect the necessary improvement in performance by September 2015. This would result in the issue of a Warning notice and direct intervention in the governance and leadership of the school.

9.4 The LA indicated that we were in new territory in terms of process and action, as previous applications to replace the Governors with an IEB in other schools had been done with agreement of the school. An over-riding concern was to act at speed so as to minimise disruption to the students. Up until 23<sup>rd</sup> December it was understood by the Governors and leadership team that the LA's aim was to put an IEB in place and secure strengthened leadership for the start of the Spring term on 5<sup>th</sup> January. When it became clear that this would not be possible the LA confirmed their support for the school's existing management arrangements for the remainder of 2014-15, but proceeded with their application to remove the governing body and instate an IEB.

Magda Moorey  
Chair of Governors of Sedgehill School (23.10.14-22.01.15)

4<sup>th</sup> February 2015