

Learning from Successful Education Improvement in the London Borough of Hackney

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Introduction

Let me say once more what a pleasure and a privilege it is for me to be addressing you today. Thank you for your very generous hospitality.

I am looking forward to the discussion that will follow my second lecture of the day! Not least because it will give me the opportunity to hear from the very distinguished panel of discussants assembled here.

One of the reasons why I was delighted to accept Hiroko's invitation to come here was the singular opportunity it provided me to learn more about Senshu University's distinguished history.

For over 130 years Senshu has contributed to the public life of Japan, educating and preparing many talented people to participate in the economic and social development of your country.

Senshu has been a leader in teaching young people how to solve problems, how take the initiative, how to devise practical solutions to the challenges of our time.

The success of Senshu's approach to developing *socio-intelligence* calls to mind Martin Luther King's observation: "Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education."

I believe Senshu's founder's, Nagatane Soma and Inajiro Tajiri and Tanetaro Megata and Shigetada Komai would be proud of how well you have nurtured the principle of serving the public good and contributing to the strength of your society through education.

Every generation needs its best and brightest to enter our public service, and I believe that education is the greatest of the public services.

How we improve schools to ensure pupils achieve their full potential, realise their ambitions, and contribute to strengthening our societies, goes to the very heart of the education debate. It was at the heart of our work in Hackney.

Throughout the ten years that The Learning Trust was responsible for education in Hackney, and subsequently, we have worked hard to prove that a pupil's financial circumstances, whether they come from a poor family, should not pre-determine their attainment at school.

That has been a key part of our moral purpose:

To ensure that every young person in Hackney can maximise the lifelong opportunities they have in front of them, by raising achievement and aspiration so that every child can experience success and is able to make the best possible start in life, regardless of where they live, where they go to school, or their family background.

In a Borough like Hackney, where the rate of child poverty is 41% (the second highest level of poverty in the UK after Tower Hamlets)¹ our moral purpose had an even greater importance: to ensure that deprivation, family breakdown and poor housing do not become barriers to attainment; that poverty does not become an excuse for low expectations and low achievement. This morning I talked to you about what The Learning Trust did to improve education in Hackney; how we raised standards of teaching and improved pupil attainment.

This afternoon, I am going to set out for you some of the lessons that we learned over the 10 years of The Learning Trust. If you were to ask me what were the reasons for The Learning Trust's success I would say:

1. We had a clear vision of what we wanted to achieve;
2. We were given the time necessary to achieve our vision;
3. We were able to appoint first class leaders, not only in schools, but at the Trust;
4. We were willing (and able) to make tough decisions;
5. We were innovative, and remained relevant; and
6. We were not prepared to let economic deprivation become an excuse for underachievement.

Throughout the ten years of The Learning Trust we were continually challenged. Taken together, these factors enabled us to meet and master these challenges, to maintain our focus on what really mattered: improving schools and raising pupil attainment.

1. A clear vision.

Let me begin by emphasising the importance of our vision.

The depth of the Council's failure from 1990 was such that The Learning Trust needed to establish a credible vision that would inspire trust amongst our schools and the wider community in Hackney.

Given the number of initiatives that had been tried and had failed in Hackney this was not an easy undertaking. There was a widespread feeling that Hackney had been used as a laboratory

by government's experimenting with hit squads and privatisation.

The involvement of Nord Anglia, appointed to run Hackney's school improvement services in 1999, was the latest in a line of failed interventions by government.

Headteachers were frustrated – as the Ofsted reports testify. Parents were concerned about the quality of the education their children were receiving.

So, at the beginning of the Trust's contract, there was a sense, particularly – although by no means exclusively - amongst headteachers that we were the latest government experiment and another one – like the proverbial London bus – would be along in a minute.

In some of my first meetings with headteachers, I experienced first-hand some of this scepticism. I was told that I was only planning to stay in Hackney for eighteen months before going on to something elsewhere.

Incidentally, I have now been in Hackney for almost 16 years!

A clear vision of what we wanted the Trust to achieve slowly began to win the confidence of the headteachers, which in turn began to influence the thinking of other people in the community.

Having a clear vision enabled us to build the right strategies around primary and secondary improvement. If we had not had a clear vision, no strategy we devised would have succeeded.

The vision for The Learning Trust was to be one of the most effective providers of education services in the country. The Learning Trust's vision for education was that all children and young people in Hackney should receive high quality teaching, allowing them to achieve their full potential.

My view of The Learning Trust was that we should always add value to education, and this was most effectively achieved by creating a culture of high expectation around attainment and learning and an ethos that dismissed excuses and valued the contribution of staff and students.

In March 2002, I set out what I believed were the main characteristics of a good LEA and which would inform The Learning Trust:

- ▶ Advocacy – collaboration, representation, persuasion;
- ▶ Leadership – vision, expertise, quality;
- ▶ Transparency – accountability, supportive, engaged;
- ▶ Creativity – innovation, initiative, aspiration;
- ▶ Communication – consultation, responsiveness, delegation; and
- ▶ Values – inclusiveness, diversity, equity.

These became the characteristics that defined The Learning Trust when it began in August 2002.

Michael Barber has described this approach as the “high challenge high support” performance

management model.

The principle of equality informed our interventions in schools that were failing to deliver the best possible quality of education for their pupils – every pupil deserved the best possible start in life.

We also wanted to build and maintain the public’s confidence in the local education system, meeting parents’ higher expectations for their children, while reducing the discernible middle class trend towards private schools.

The Learning Trust’s achievement was not to secure improvement in some of the schools in Hackney, but in raising achievement across all schools in the Borough. This could only have been achieved by securing the trust of schools – and encouraging them to raise their ambition – and winning the confidence of Hackney’s political leadership and the wider community.

Our vision for improving schools and raising pupil attainment contributed to building that trust. In their 2003 inspection report, Ofsted recorded: “The support for school improvement is now driven by a clear vision and appropriate priorities that are understood by the staff of the Learning Trust and by schools”.²

The Trust’s vision for education in Hackney set the direction of the organization, guiding our decisions and strategies.

- ▶ Recruiting high quality teachers, and to develop talented school leaders was informed by our vision;
- ▶ Rebuilding and renovating our secondary schools, through the Building Schools for the Future programme; and
- ▶ Raising pupil attainment and increasing the ambition for all of our pupils in every one of our schools;

Achieving the sustained improvements in education required in Hackney wasn’t straightforward. There were setbacks during the ten years, and disappointments, but we never lost our focus on what we wanted to achieve.

Our vision was realistic, but it was also ambitious. As Michelangelo is said to have observed, “The greatest danger is not that our aim is too high – but that it is too low and we reach it”.

Mike Tomlinson was no less eloquent when he said that The Learning Trust would have succeeded when parents were fighting to get their children *into* Hackney secondary schools, not fighting to get them *out* of them.

We succeeded in this, as in so many other ambitions: by 2012, 83% of parents were putting a Hackney Secondary school as their first choice for their child to go to when they left primary school.

2. The importance of stability

It takes a long time to create a system that can bring about sustained improvement in schools. Medium to long-term planning is necessary if the progress is to be enduring.

Short-term fixes can produce quick results, but they only rarely address the fundamental weaknesses that cause a system to fail or underperform.

A long-term approach to education improvement requires patience and confidence in the strategy being implemented. That confidence comes from knowing that the vision is right.

It can be assisted by the removal of undue political influence and intervention. In The Learning Trust's case the length of its contract (ten years) give it a reasonable opportunity to implement the measures required to bring about the necessary improvements.

Once again, in 2002 Headteachers were sceptical. Since the end of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in 1990 they had seen a lot of people leave, both from the council – including two directors of education (Gus John and Elizabeth Reid) – and in their own schools.

Hackney Council had contributed to this through its inefficiency and incompetence. It failed to ensure that it had the necessary payroll systems in place.

As a consequence, teachers and staff transferring from ILEA to Hackney Council were not paid in their first month working for the Council.

It caused grievous harm to the Council's reputation and credibility as the Local Education Authority from the beginning.

When I became Hackney's Director of Education in January 2001, the Council's budget was in meltdown – the 114 Order was still in place - and there was no overall control in the Council.

The position in the Education Department was equally turbulent.

Members of staff were demoralised, by the repeated Ofsted reports, the widespread negative media coverage and the pervasive sense of crisis.

This demoralisation was further exacerbated by the fact that the senior management team I inherited was in the process of effectively disassembling itself.

Senior managers left, often to set up private consultancy firms, where they would cherry-pick other members of the Department's staff to come and work for them.

Stability was in very short supply!

The contract between Hackney Council and the Learning Trust underpinned our stability. These negotiations were tough.

The Chief Executive was determined to concede the minimal amount of autonomy, particularly where finances were concerned, whilst I wanted to achieve the maximum freedom and flexibility for the Trust in order to give it every possible chance of success.

At one point The Chief Executive argued in favour of the Trust being given just a two-year

contract, and I countered with a proposal for 25 years – in the end we settled on 10 years!

It was crucial to the success of the Trust that the contract we entered into with the Council was tight enough to focus on a small number of Key Performance Indicators, rather than a sprawling contract, with a multitude of incidental secondary measures against which we would have been held accountable and which would have been open to continued interference, uncertainty and disputation.

This would have eroded the Trust's independence from the beginning, leading to a permanent state of attrition with the Council that would have poisoned relationships and weakened both of our efforts to improve services.

The contract specified 28 key performance indicators against which the Trust was measured. In negotiating the contract I was mindful of the lessons of the contracts between LAs and private improvement providers, many of which bristled with KPIs running into the hundreds. Indeed, in the contract between Hackney and Nord Anglia was a performance indicator stipulating that the phone must be answered within six rings!³

The KPIs in the Trust's concerned schools' and pupils' performance, and the effectiveness of the support given by the Trust to schools. The Council monitored the Trust's performance against these. It also had to consider and approve the Trust's annual plan.

Securing a viable contract was central to The Learning Trust's stability. The appointment of Mike Tomlinson as chair of The Learning Trust was a crucial factor in establishing our credibility.

It was important to secure a big figure who had access to central government, who could play an ambassadorial role for the Trust on a national stage, as well as inspiring confidence locally. Hackney's reputation worked against us, with few people of any calibre wanting to be associated with what was happening in the Borough.

In the end Mike Tomlinson chose us. Nearing the end of his time as Chief Inspector of Schools and head of Ofsted, Mike expressed a keen interest in playing a role in the Trust, as Chair of the Board. This was much more than we could ever have hoped for, and we accepted Mike's offer with enthusiasm.

Mike's passion for Hackney's schools, his unshakeable commitment to raising standards, his stature as an 'education statesman' and his shrewd intelligence in adapting to the nuances of Hackney politics made him a superb chair and champion of The Learning Trust.

As one headteacher commented, Sir Mike Tomlinson's appointment as Chair gave The Learning Trust "street credibility and professional respectability".

The Education Secretary who appointed Mike Tomlinson to chair The Learning Trust, Estelle Morris, has emphasised the fact that he came from Ofsted: "nobody could criticise him as being weak on evaluation or frightened to be tough on school".

Mike Tomlinson and I quickly established a very strong partnership as Chair and Chief

Executive of The Learning Trust, based on mutual respect, shared values and a passion for improving education.

Together we worked harmoniously for the first half of the Trust's 10-year contract, anticipating developments in national policy, and understanding how these could benefit schools in Hackney. The Learning Trust was fortunate in both of the men who chaired our Board of Directors. Mike Tomlinson made us credible from the beginning.

When Mike retired in 2007 he was succeeded by Richard Hardie, the Chair of UBS Ltd, who had served as a non-executive director on the Trust Board since 2003.

It was during Richard's term as chair (2007-2012) that the Board grew in confidence and stature, providing valuable constructive challenge that informed the development of our improvement strategies.

Both Mike and Richard contributed a lot to Hackney. As Mike Tomlinson once observed, Hackney is a place that "gets into your bloodstream".

Endlessly fascinating in its diversity and the wealth of its creative talent, it is a compelling place to work and live in. I would say that Hackney was also very lucky in having people of Mike and Richard's quality championing their cause.

Mike and Richard's contributions are evidence that leadership is crucial to the success of any organisation.

3. Appointing first class leaders

Appointing leaders who have had a positive impact on the services they are responsible for was a real success for The Learning Trust. Nowhere is this more evident than in a number of senior appointments we made.

Annie Kent was TLT's first director of finance, from 2002-2006.

She inherited a highly challenging financial position in 2002 – at one point in the first year of the contract there was a severe risk of the Trust not having sufficient funds to operate effectively.

Annie's skill in managing the budget and her assiduous focus on raising income ensured TLT was not just financially secure but able to generate year-on-year surpluses to additionally fund our school improvement priorities.

In school improvement, we focussed on appointing leaders with a substantial track record of effective leadership.

After an initial false start, which required the Trust's first director of school improvement to be removed, we appointed Steve Belk as Executive Director for Standards & School Improvement.

Steve brought to the role a depth and weight of experience and knowledge from his time as a

Hackney Headteacher and head of school improvement in Lewisham.

Steve's understanding of how schools operate meant that he was able to provide excellent advice and guidance to headteachers, his experience of raising standards meant that he provided very strong challenge to them.

Aware of the impact failing to improve the quality of education a school provides, Steve was a powerful advocate of the moral purpose of leadership in education.

In raising school standards, improving teaching, learning and leadership, Steve was very ably supported by Tricia Okoruwa.

When I first came to Hackney in January 2001, Tricia was the Headteacher of Kingsmead Primary School, one of only three primaries at that time rated by Ofsted as Outstanding.

The Ofsted inspection team identified the qualities that made Tricia a superb leader:

The headteacher has high expectations and vision that inspires a dedicated team of teachers and support staff... The headteacher has refused to accept that the early language difficulties and ethnic diversity of the pupils should be any barrier to high achievement. She has built around her a team of senior staff members who are committed to the same vision and are imbued with the same strong sense of purpose. The school has won School Achievement Awards for the last two years and is a dynamic, well-integrated, multi-racial community.⁴

They are, I think, an excellent description of what any school leader should aspire to if they want to be judged outstanding.

We appointed Tricia to lead our efforts to improve primary schools. In this role she brought to bear her vast experience of primary school leadership, and her detailed knowledge of pedagogy and strategies for leadership ensured a dramatic turnaround in performance amongst our primary schools.

Tricia's leadership took our primaries from being consistently ranked in the bottom 10 LAs in England to being in the best performing 25 per cent.

It was a profound tragedy when Tricia passed away in late 2014 at the age of only 50. She died far too young, but her contribution to Hackney over two decades is an inspiring example of public service.

Even with leaders of Annie, Steve and Tricia's quality, we would not have achieved the scale of improvement that we did without recruiting high quality school leaders and teachers.

We invested resources in recruiting first class teachers and nurturing talent within Hackney.

The way in which we recruited quality teachers to Hackney, and developed a continuing professional development offer remains one of the Trust's innovations of which I am most proud.

As I noted this morning, we used advertising approaches never previously employed. Thirty

teachers a year developed their talents by taking up a Master's Degree in teaching or an education related subject.

We built trust and capacity with schools, whilst encouraging the widest possible range of partnerships, with parents, community groups and governing bodies.

Our approach to school improvement was based on providing leadership with high aspirations and ambitious expectations and challenging under performance - not being satisfied with being satisfactory.

This required a relentless drive to raise standards both in schools and the services supporting them.

Over time we established a culture of clear planning, robust, relevant targets and benchmarking local performance against the best.

One of the few services to be rated highly in the 2000 Ofsted inspection report was the Research, Statistics & Evaluation team.

Our monitoring, challenge, support and intervention was predicated on Hackney schools being provided with high quality, sophisticated contextual and benchmarked data to complement DfE performance tables and Ofsted inspection reports.

All of these achievements fed into the central purpose of The Learning Trust - improving Hackney schools.

4. Making tough decisions

One of the characteristics that exemplified The Learning Trust's effectiveness, in contrast to the Council, was in our decision-making.

The Council's decision-making process was often confused, characterised by an inability to establish priorities. When decisions were made - for example to close Hackney Downs secondary school - local councillors would then insist on stopping the implementation of the decision. In the case of Hackney Downs, this led to the government sending in a team to close the school.

The Trust operated efficiently because, once a policy or resources decision had been made, we got on with the work of implementing it.

There were no second thoughts, or last minute lurches motivated by short-term political expediency.

As I have noted, this was particularly the case in respect of schools organisation - the closing of failing schools like Kingsland, Homerton and Laburnum and the changes to school leadership. The Trust made a number of mistakes in the appointment of key senior staff at the beginning of our contract. Once we identified these weaknesses staff were removed from the organisation quickly.

In 2006, I closed down HLT's Human Resources department at the end of one week – following a lengthy period of underperformance and dysfunction that had damaged the service in the eyes of schools – removing a number of staff. We set about creating a new HR service at the beginning of the next week.

It was a decision that demonstrated our seriousness about challenging underperformance wherever it was, and it sent a signal to schools that we were determined they should not be expected to put up with a poor quality service.

Removing underperforming leaders in school was also critical to improving standards and raising the quality of teaching and learning. In order to achieve this effectively, HLT has to demonstrate its resolve to remove underperforming headteachers.

Between 2002 and 2007, I met with over twenty school leaders specifically to discuss their performance and, as a consequence – through one mechanism or another – they left the school where they were headteacher.

The leader of the local Headteacher's Association, Sean Flood observed at a meeting of Heads in 2014:

“Alan was never willing to keep quiet about underperforming leaders. There was one period when I spent more time with him defending heads than I did with my staff”.⁵

Let me say something about academies. These have been amongst the most controversial reforms to education in recent years.

This was particularly so in Hackney, where the trade unions were particularly strong – both in schools and in the Council - and implacably opposed to the introduction of academies.

The first academy in Hackney was Mossbourne. It was established on the site of Hackney Downs School, which had received extensive media coverage in 1995 and 1996 due to the Council's chaotic attempts to close it.

The Mossbourne proposal attracted extensive – and very vocal - opposition from the trade unions, as well as other groups.

At the first public meeting on Mossbourne large numbers of people attended. Both the sponsor, Sir Clive Bourne and I spoke, and were received politely.

The meeting only became rowdy when we explained that we would open Mossbourne one year group at a time – starting with Year 7. The crowd, which comprised many parents, were incensed that there would only be 180 places.

As far as they were concerned we were not being radical enough.

We did not discount the opposition that the Academies Programme aroused in Hackney and neighbouring inner London boroughs; we took it into account as we shaped an approach that reflected the Borough's requirements and characteristics.

The Learning Trust, working in partnership with Hackney Council, developed a set of conditions that prospective academy sponsors would have to agree to meet; these would help

root each Academy firmly within the community it would serve:

1. Each Academy would have to be non-selective, non-denominational and mixed;
2. In order to ensure a smooth assimilation into the existing network of schools, every Academy would begin with a Year 7 cohort and take in a new cohort each year, building schools numbers over time;
3. The Academy sponsor would have a clear, existing connection with the borough;
4. Every Academy would be independent and autonomous. In return, the academy would play an active role in the borough's education, building partnerships with primary and secondary schools.

Once again, the confidence we had in our vision enabled us to make hard decisions. Principled pragmatism in the pursuit of improved pupil attainment was at the heart of each decision we made.

5. Continuing to be relevant

Innovation is crucial to the success of any organisation. The Learning Trust was established at a time when government was encouraging public services to become more creative in the way in which they delivered services to the public.

The Trust was itself an innovation.

Our governance structure, with a board of directors comprising a variety of people bringing different expertise and experience, was new.

For the first time headteachers and chairs of school governing bodies shared in the responsibility for an education system.

In order to build a more constructive relationship with headteachers, we established Headteacher Termly Briefings to encourage discussions about educational issues arising and long-term ideas for borough-wide improvement.

We also created an annual two-day Headteachers Conference, inviting guest speakers such as Michael Fullan to address headteachers and senior managers at the Trust.

The Trust's independence from Hackney Council proved to be a significant factor in the organisation's ability to innovate.

What guided that innovation was the principle of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Encouraging creativity empowered Trust staff to adopt fresh ways of thinking.

New ideas and innovation, together with autonomy and the opportunity to take calculated risks, resulted in a number of borough-wide initiatives, of which Words Unite – Get Hackney

Reading was one of the most successful.

In 2003 we established an Innovation Fund which was designed to encourage school leaders to develop ideas for improving education, not just in their school, but across the system.

In truth this was not a success – our schools were not then thinking about education improvement on a borough-wide scale and many of our headteachers were focussed on raising standards in their own schools.

But this helped inform our appreciation of the capacity of our schools and where we could provide support, not least in advocating a borough-wide approach to improving standards.

President Kennedy was fond of the saying: “success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan”. I would argue that, provided you are willing to learn the lessons honestly and with humility, failure can be turned into success.

As I have said, the way in which we recruited quality teachers to Hackney, and developed a continuing professional development offer remains one of the Trust’s innovations of which I am most proud.

As I noted this morning, we used advertising approaches never previously employed. Thirty teachers a year developed their talents by taking up a Master’s Degree in teaching or an education related subject.

Hackney’s Professional Development Centre, the Tomlinson Centre, is an outstanding example of how a borough should invest in building the skills of teachers and employees.

In 2015, Hackney Learning Trust provides more than 150 training courses for primary, secondary and special schools as part of our continuing professional development programme.

Over the years of The Learning Trust’s contract a number of national policy changes were implemented that influenced our work.

Changes to the Key Stage 2 and GCSE measures in 2006 adjusted the expectations of what pupils were expected to achieve.

The Every Child Matters agenda brought education into closer working partnership with social care for children and safeguarding.

The steadily increasing autonomy for schools from LA control has required a new relationship to be forged between the two.

These developments required innovation in order to retain a meaningful and influential role in school improvement.

The Hackney Learning Trust which was established in 2012 was designed to meet the challenges presented by increasing school autonomy and substantial reductions in public spending.

6. Not letting economic deprivation become an excuse for underachievement

In 2004, the government's Indices of Deprivation placed Hackney as the most deprived borough in England.⁶

In 2010, in spite of significant improvements, including higher levels of employment, Hackney remained one of the most deprived part of London.⁷

The link between poverty and low educational outcomes has been analysed in a variety of academic research in a number of countries.

The Learning Trust proved that economically deprived neighbourhoods can't be simply written off as places where aspirations are always low, and will always remain low, where pupils from poor families will not fulfil their potential.

Any credible policy to increase social mobility must engage with young people's high aspirations providing them and their families, with the support and knowledge to find the pathways through education and employment to realise these ambitions.⁸

One of the things we focussed on from 2002 onwards was reducing the differential performance between schools.

A significant number of schools in Hackney taught pupils with similar background characteristics.

In 2002, for example, in 21 of our 53 primary schools more than 50% of their pupils in year 6 were eligible for Free School Meals. In one school as many as 82% of year 6 pupils were eligible for FSM.

In the same year, 2002, 32 of our 53 primary schools had more than 10% of their pupils arriving in year 5 or year 6, rather than beginning in reception. In one school 32% of pupils arrived in years 5 or 6.

In 28 of our 53 primary schools more than 15% of their year 6 pupils were not fluent in English. In one school 55% of its year 6 pupils had English as an additional language.

In 2002, 66% of pupils in Hackney achieved Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English, but achievement was significantly lower for those pupils who were eligible for free school meals, or arrived in year 5 or 6 or who were not fluent in English.

Only 58% of pupils who were eligible for free school meals,

Only 53% of pupils who arrived in years 5 or 6, and

Only 49% of pupils who were not fluent in English, achieved Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English in that year.

This was part of our moral purpose: how could it be fair that one school was teaching pupils to a very high standard, regardless of their background, whilst another school was letting these pupils down?

In some schools, having a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSM or with English as an additional language became an excuse. Headteachers would explain away their failure to achieve high results: “what do you expect from a cohort where half our pupils are not fluent in English?”

This was unacceptable and Steve Belk, Tricia and I vigorously contested this view at every opportunity.

By 2012, 81% of pupils in Hackney achieved Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English and Maths.

The attainment for those pupils who were eligible for free school meals, or arrived in year 5 or 6 or who were not fluent in English had also increased significantly.

77% of pupils who were eligible for free school meals,

72% of pupils who arrived in years 5 or 6, and

81% of pupils with English as an additional language, achieved Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English and Maths in that year.

In addition to the significant improvements in attainment from Early Years to GCSE, Hackney has substantially expanded Further Education.

In 2002, no Hackney secondary school had a sixth form college offering Post-16 education.

In 2015, every secondary school and Academy in the Borough has a sixth form, providing Hackney students with a diverse range of A-Levels and apprenticeships, equipping young people with the skills for work.

We were keen to encourage ambition.

Hackney is on the doorstep of the City of London. Just a bus ride away from some of the most deprived parts of the UK is one of the world's greatest concentrations of wealth.

We were fortunate in having Richard Hardie, the Chair of UBS, on our Board – as Chair for the second half of our 10-year contract.

Richard was instrumental in bringing businesses into contact with schools in innovative ways that benefitted each party.

Mentoring programmes were established where employees of UBS, KPMG, PwC and others went into Hackney primary schools to mentor pupils' reading, writing and maths.

Richard championed Hackney's cause through the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) and Inspire! persuading City firms to participate in work experience schemes, providing pupils from Hackney secondary schools with the opportunity to see what lawyers and accountants, insurance brokers and IT technicians did for a living.

Some of the best work, for example Linklaters' programme *Realising Potential*, helped to improve literacy in primary schools and, through mentoring, raise awareness of potential opportunities and identify career pathways at secondary schools.

Each of our Academies has a specialism, which has contributed to raising pupil's interest in pursuing careers in a range of professions.

This has brought young people into contact with a range of business, academic, medical and artistic organisations, groups and individuals who have provided advice, mentoring and careers guidance:

- ▶ Mossbourne - specialising in music;
- ▶ Petchey - specialising in health, care and medical science;
- ▶ City - specialising in business and finance;
- ▶ Bridge - specialising in music and mathematics;
- ▶ Skinners' - specialising in enterprise; and
- ▶ Clapton – specialising in science and art.

Each of our secondary schools has formed a link to a college at either Oxford or Cambridge, as well as with other universities.

In 2008, 10 pupils from Mossbourne Academy won places at Oxbridge colleges, the first Hackney pupils to do so in a decade or more.

In 2014, 162 pupils from Hackney secured places at Russell Group universities.

Conclusion

We are now well into the Twenty-first century and the education landscape in England has been dramatically altered.

Increasing decentralisation and greater autonomy are changing both the shape and requirements of schooling and the responsibilities of schools.

Schools now have a greater accountability for their pupils' results, but also their wellbeing; preparing them for jobs and careers of the future and how they contribute to and interact with society.

Education must be understood at both its micro-level: the attainment of results, the building of knowledge and development of life skills, and at its macro-level: how education contributes to building social responsibility and contributes to the strength of communities.

English local councils have a duty to support schools as their responsibilities are redefined and become broader.

Part of this is about improving incentives to make headship in particular more attractive for existing heads and developing the opportunities for those who will become school leaders in the future.

There is also a role for councils to use what Theodore Roosevelt termed “the Bully-Pulpit”, to take the opportunity to speak out, argue for an improvement agenda: champion the moral purpose of education.

UNESCO has defined *The Knowledge Society* as requiring,

Skills such as problem solving, communication, collaboration, experimentation, critical thinking and creative expression.

These skills become curricular goals in themselves and the objects of new assessment methods.

Perhaps the most significant aim is for students to be able to create their own learning goals and plans – to establish what they already know, assess their strengths and weaknesses, design a learning plan, stay on-task, track their own progress, build on successes and adjust to failures.

These are skills that can be used throughout a lifetime to participate in a learning society.

To be truly successful an education system must be ambitious: to improve outcomes and raise standards of learning and attainment for all children and young people, and it must have a clear moral purpose.

The characteristics of an education system that has at its heart a clear moral purpose are:

- ▶ Ambition for the all-round development of each child, including academic success, social development and strength of character;
- ▶ Aspiration for all of a community’s children by each and every one of the schools, settings and colleges in the area;
- ▶ Investment in education should be promoted throughout the wider community, including encouraging parental aspiration, children’s and young people’s desire to do well and respect for and celebration of achievement within communities;

Opportunity is expanded by high quality education as children and young people learn skills that enable them to grasp opportunities, leading to better employment opportunities and the gratification that comes from fulfilling their potential.

Social Justice is strengthened by education as it helps to build a society that challenges prejudice, opposes oppression, rejects intolerance and overcomes inequality.

The focus of The Learning Trust, as an organisation, was entirely on education and children’s services, providing support services – for example, special educational needs, admissions, exclusions, pupil benefits- leadership and governance.

Unlike the Council, we did not have any additional corporate responsibilities, so there was nothing to distract us from improving education in Hackney.

Having an independent body, charged with a single purpose – in the Trust's case, improving education – is an important decision to make.

It can involve challenging vested interests, dismantling established structures.

In some instances it will require the acknowledgement that previous efforts, however well intentioned, have not been successful.

It will be necessary for bold, decisive action to be taken, to cut through inertia and opposition to establish something new that can lead to successful results.

For such a body to be successful it must have stability. Strategic, operational and financial independence are essential, and it must be given a sufficient period of time to introduce necessary changes and implement these.

These were the key characteristics of The Learning Trust: independence, stability and a clear sense of purpose.

The Learning Trust re-created an education community in Hackney. Before the Trust was set up there was a saying in the borough that schools did well in Hackney *despite* the LEA.

The relationship between schools and the LEA was characterised by suspicion and a measure of hostility.

It was, after all, headteachers of Hackney schools who told Ofsted that education services should be removed from the Local Authority.

The Trust's partnership with schools was based on a clear strategy: we would not tolerate low standards.

The Learning Trust was able to exercise a moral authority.

We proved we had the capacity and the competence to identify what needed to be improved.

We worked with schools, encouraging them to be ambitious for their pupils and challenging them on their performance.

When it was necessary, we acted decisively to intervene in those schools that consistently underperformed and support those that were struggling.

A community is only as strong as those who participate within it.

The Trust encouraged collaboration between schools - strengthening links and encouraging competition - to improve standards and build a sense of collective responsibility for improvement.

The Learning Trust restored public confidence in education in Hackney.

We created an education service that people felt proud to work for and which earned the respect of the community - headteachers and teaching staff, governors and parents, and the pupils themselves.

We were not imprisoned by history, or weighed down by the baggage of what had gone before. The Learning Trust marked a fresh start for schools in Hackney. From the beginning we emphasised the importance of good quality education and we created a service where there were no excuses for poor attainment or low ambition.

We proved that schools in Hackney could perform as well as schools in any other part of England. Many Hackney schools now *outperform* those in more affluent and advantaged areas of the country.

I am proud of The Learning Trust's record, it was the achievement of a team I was privileged to lead. I count myself fortunate to have worked with so many talented, passionate colleagues whose commitment was an inspiration.

Together, we improved the opportunities - the life chances - of children and young people in Hackney. That work continues, and our determination to make sure future generations achieve even better is as strong now as it was in 2002 - stronger in many ways, because the challenges, and the opportunities, are even greater.

To have contributed to the revival of education in the Hackney, to have played a part in revitalising teaching and learning, to have helped improve pupil attainment, and to have had the chance to renovate school buildings, so that future generations can learn in modern settings, has been the most gratifying part of my career in public service.

<note>

- 1 'Hackney Child Poverty and Family Wellbeing Plan, 2015-2018', London Borough of Hackney. In Hackney the rate of child poverty of 41% takes account of disposable income after housing costs have been deducted. In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets 49% of children are living in poverty.
- 2 Ofsted Inspection of Hackney Local Education Authority, September 2003.
- 3 *A Revolution in a Decade: 10 out of 10*, Alan Boyle and Salli Humphreys, October 2011.
- 4 Ofsted Inspection report - Kingsmead Primary School, September 2003.
- 5 Introductory Remarks by Sean Flood, headteacher of Our Lady & St Joseph's Primary School at the Hackney Headteachers Conference, 2014.
- 6 The English Indices of Deprivation use 38 separate indicators, organised across seven distinct domains. These are Income, Employment, Health and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Other Services, Crime and Living Environment.
- 7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf>
- 8 See, for example the report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations' by Ralf St Clair, Keith Kintrea and Muir Houston, of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/young-people-education-attitudes-summary.pdf>>.