

DIRECTORS' REPORT

ALL SCHOOL GOVERNING BOARDS

SUMMER TERM 2025

This term's report is prepared by BDSIP for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, and includes the following items:

For Action

1. Attendance Performance, Local and National Update
2. Schools Strengthening Inclusion and Belonging Through Rights Respecting Schools Awards (RRSA) & Race & Social Justice (RSJ) Initiative

For Information

1. Special Educational Needs and Disability Update
2. The Aspire Virtual School Education Report 2023-24
3. London Governors' Newsletter Spring 2025

Elaine Allegretti, Director of People and Resilience
& Jane Hargreaves, Commissioning Director Education

For Action:

1	Attendance Performance, Local & National Update
Purpose: To provide information regarding Attendance data scrutiny. To promote the favoured DFE approach that focuses on 'Attendance Banding' with schools for improving attendance. Summary of 'Absence Bandings' explanation for School Governors: The absence bandings report, available in the 'insights dashboard' of the Monitor your school attendance tool and accessible via the View your education data (VYED) platform, is a useful tool for reviewing school absence data. It allows schools, academy trusts, and local authorities to delve deeper into absence patterns beyond the headline rates. absence bandings user guide <u>Key Features of the Absence Bandings Report</u> • Understanding absence distribution • Identifying pupils with persistent and severe absence rates • Spotting absence trends • Identifying pupils in need of support • Considering underlying causes of absence • Devising strategies to address absence challenges <u>Recommendations for School Governors</u> • Regular Monitoring with their schools: Utilise the report frequently to keep abreast of attendance patterns and identify issues early. • Targeted Interventions: Ensure their schools have developed and implemented strategies to support pupils identified with or at risk of persistent and severe absence. • Collaboration: Work closely with teachers, parents, and local authorities to address underlying causes of absences. • Policy Review: Ensure school policies on attendance are robust, inclusive, and effectively communicated to all stakeholders. • Training and Awareness: Provide training for staff on how to use the report and interpret the data to make informed decisions.	
Background information: At a minimum, please ensure that you have: 1 Reminded yourself of your statutory responsibilities on school attendance, as set out in the. Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK 2. Resources for schools (worth looking at) Attendance toolkit for schools.pdf The toolkit includes practical examples of how schools can fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Helpful for discussing your school's practice, your school can use data to target support, how effective practice has been implemented, and where you have further to go. 3. Review the absence bandings user guide to find out how to use the absence data to target your resources to have the greatest impact.	

Attendance Banding Example: Local authority absence by year group. (All schools have access to their own banded data for their individual schools.

Table showing the absence percentage of secondary school pupils in each year group, in 5% absence bands up to 50% and above. Results are based on data from the start of the autumn term 2024 to 2025 up to Tuesday 31 December 2024. Data includes pupils with 20 or more possible sessions in the academic year-to-date.

Overall Absence Band	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
less than 5%	70%	63%	61%	59%	61%
5% to less than 10%	18%	20%	20%	21%	20%
10% to less than 15%	6%	7%	8%	8%	8%
15% to less than 20%	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%
20% to less than 25%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
25% to less than 30%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
30% to less than 35%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
35% to less than 40%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%
40% to less than 45%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
45% to less than 50%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
50% and above (severely absent)	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%
10% and above (persistently absent)	13%	17%	19%	20%	19%

Current year attendance data:

Pupil absence in Barking and Dagenham 2024/25 'Year to date' (29/04/25)

		Barking and Dagenham	England
Total	Overall Absence	6.2%	6.7%
	Persistent Absence	17.5%	18.4%
Primary	Overall Absence	5.4%	5.2%
	Persistent Absence	17.6%	14.1%
Secondary	Overall Absence	6.5%	8.3%
	Persistent Absence	19.9%	22.9%
Special	Overall Absence	16.6%	12.9%
	Persistent Absence	45.5%	35.8%

4. In a separate document I have provided extracts from the Local Authority report summary from VYED. Schools can access their own reports via the VYED platform and gain insights into their own data as well as comparative data. Extracts are for Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools and Academies Primary and Secondary.		
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2

Schools Strengthening Inclusion and Belonging Through Rights Respecting Schools Awards (RRSA) & Race & Social Justice (RSJ) Initiative

Purpose:

This report provides updates on two initiatives: Schools Strengthening Inclusion and Belonging Through RRSA and the Race & Social Justice (RSJ) Initiative.

Summary:

unicef

UNITED KINGDOM

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

Schools Strengthening Inclusion and Belonging Through RRSA

Barking & Dagenham is making great strides in embedding children’s rights at the heart of school life through the **Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)**.

The award focuses on embedding the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into the school's policies, practices, and ethos, aiming to improve children's wellbeing and empower them to thrive.

A newly formed steering group – made up of local schools already at Gold and Silver– held a successful first meeting and is now looking ahead to plan events and initiatives for the Summer/Autumn terms. These activities aim to support more schools through the registration process and help them progress toward achieving Gold. With free funding available until March 2028, there’s a valuable opportunity for schools to engage with the RRSA, which uses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for school improvement. By placing pupil participation at the centre of safeguarding, inclusion, wellbeing and citizenship, schools can build stronger, more inclusive communities.

Number of schools at each stage of RRSA in Barking & Dagenham, April 2025

Registration	Bronze	Silver	Gold
10	12	4	5

**Testimonial from Matt Murphy
Headteacher Henry Green Primary School
Gold Rights Respecting School**

Achieving the UNICEF Gold Rights Respecting School Award has supported us in further developing a culture of respect, inclusion, and pupil voice across the school. Children have a clearer understanding of their rights and are becoming more confident in expressing their views in a respectful and thoughtful way. The rights-respecting approach has complemented our existing work on behaviour and relationships, helping to promote a calm and considerate learning environment. It has also provided a useful framework for discussions around fairness, responsibility, and global citizenship, which are becoming more embedded in everyday school life.

RSJ Initiative update

Two priorities that the RSJ Initiative is working on are:

- 1) Case Studies: Schools' RSJ Facilitators have been invited to contribute, through a case study, to the creation of a 'Good Practice and Learning Guide on RSJ' for the borough's schools. The purpose of the guide is to:
 - Showcase effective RSJ practices in Barking and Dagenham schools; and
 - Provide ideas to help colleagues continue integrating RSJ into everyday school life.

The vision is for this to be a practical guide for schools across Barking and Dagenham - supporting both those starting out in, and those continuing, their work to ensure students from marginalised groups are fully supported to achieve their best outcomes.

- 2) School Guidance Video in partnership with the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum: Over a year ago, young people from the Youth Forum expressed a desire to share their in-school experiences related to RSJ. Following many discussions, we have been working with the young people and some schools to produce a 'Good Practice RSJ video'. In this video, the young people, aged 13 and above, will aim to highlight positive practices and suggest areas for development under four key themes for schools to reflect on. These are:
 - Prayer rooms: how can schools safely accommodate the requirements of religious pupil groups?
 - School uniform: how have schools ensured that access to appropriate school uniform is equitable for pupils from a range of socioeconomic contexts?
 - Texturism (this is the discrimination faced by those with coarser and more afro-textured hair based on the premise that hair textures closer to European hair are more acceptable): what provisions have schools made for accommodating pupils with afro hair?
 - Culture days: what can be done to recognise the wide range of pupil backgrounds comprised within a school?

This resource is intended for training and educational use across the borough's schools.

Recommendation:

Governors are asked to:

- Speak with your school leaders or RSJ Facilitator to find out whether they are involved in writing a RSJ case study or have volunteered to be filmed for the video. If they are not, and they would like to contribute, please can they contact Nicole.Leah@BDSIP.co.uk for more information.
- Consider the benefits of signing up for the RRS award if your school hasn't already done

Contact Officers:

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Nicole Leah, Senior Inclusion Adviser, BDSIP

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Background Information:**RSJ Initiative updates**Case Studies

To support consistency across the case studies, RSJ Facilitators have been provided with a template and asked to detail actions taken or ongoing efforts in their schools to keep RSJ on the agenda.

School Guidance Video in partnership with the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum

The video is being produced by the organisation 'IDEATE-ED' and will aim to capture the voices of both students and staff involved in RSJ work, policy, and practice. The target is to complete and share the video with all schools before the summer break or in the autumn term.

In anticipation of the video launch, a group of six young people from the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum will deliver a presentation to a group of Secondary Headteachers on 16th May 2025. They will share their insights on their four key themes and explain why this work is important. The group has consulted with the wider Youth Forum to ensure the most relevant points are covered. This session will encourage Secondary Headteachers to reflect on their school's current strengths and potential areas for development in relation to RSJ.

Information items

1 Special Educational Needs and Disability Update

Purpose:

To inform and update on Local Authority action and arrangements to deliver support and provision for children and young people with SEND and Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans

Summary:

All schools are facing significant challenges in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND in Barking & Dagenham. The recent "Solving the SEND Crisis" inquiry by the UK Parliament's Education Committee highlighted the ongoing challenges in the SEND system in that the system is struggling with inadequate funding, insufficient specialist support, and long waiting times for assessments and services. The pressures and challenges continue to be seen locally and do not appear to be easing. Local authority officers continue to work in collaboration with Headteachers, BDSIP and Schools Forum to help address these pressures.

a) EHC Team

The local authority has funded 4 additional temporary staff to support the substantive team with the increasing EHC needs assessment requests, EHC Plans and annual reviews. The team is led by Amila Sarwar (EHC Unit Manager), who was appointed in August 2024, and current structure includes:

North Area:	Vacant	(EHC Area Lead)
	Gulshanara Begum	(EHC Coordinator)
	Siobhan Rice	(EHC Coordinator)
	Sarah Mudd	(EHC Coordinator)
	Aaliyah Burns	(EHC Coordinator)
	Sanaa Sabir	(Temporary EHC Coordinator)
East Area:	Samantha Fireson	(EHC Area Lead)
	Gemma Shea	(EHC Coordinator)
	Sarah Sibbons	(EHC Coordinator)
	Nazmin Uddin	(EHC Coordinator)
	Lisa Gatt	(EHC Coordinator)
West Area:	Manzoor Razan	(EHC Area Lead)
	Bobbi-Jane Freeman	(EHC Coordinator)
	Zamzam Omar	(EHC Coordinator)
	Fatma Hassan	(EHC Coordinator)
	David Barrows-Langford	(EHC Coordinator)
	Shahika Ali	(Temporary EHC Coordinator)

Officers:	Lola Adenuga	(Interim SEND Dispute Resolution Lead)
	Jessica Core	(Interim Preparation for Adulthood Lead)
	Gigi Kwong	(SEND Co-Production Lead)
	Nyiemah Metzger	(EHC Administrator)
	Vacant	(EHC Administrator)
	Owen Oriakhi	(Interim EHC Business Support Officer)

The team is currently coordinating 304 EHC needs assessments, with 174 of these being referred since January 2025. The team continue to work hard to complete assessments within statutory timescales and improve on key performance targets and the team are currently achieving the national average at 49%. The team are also currently overseeing 3157 EHCPs, with each full-time officer having a caseload of approx. 280 children and young people, in addition to an average of 27 new referrals.

There is also a focus on the annual review process and ensuring that the 'backlog' of annual reviews with pending decisions are completed, and a robust monitoring process is in place to improve annual review performance. This was identified as a priority by Ofsted. The team have additionally been working hard, with the support of temporary officers to complete decisions on the outstanding annual reviews and have achieved completion of 64% of outstanding cases. This is in the context of consideration and decision making for the approximately 2800 annual reviews that will be held during this academic year.

The local authority is continuing to recruit to posts that are vacant or covered by interim officers. There continues to be severe pressures within the service. Recruitment is challenging and along with other statutory areas in the Council – funding pressures do not currently allow staffing resources to grow to meet increased caseloads.

b) Mainstream Top Up (Element 3 Funding)

Local authority officers and the Schools Forum Chairs have worked together to set out the funding model for 2025/26 mainstream top up funding to schools. The model will continually be revised with the support of the High Needs Working Party and Schools Forum during the year, and appropriate and necessary revisions will be considered for 2026/27.

Martin Nicholson, Virtual Headteacher SEND, wrote to Headteachers to set out the position for 2025-26. All mainstream schools will receive top up funding for all children and young people with EHC Plans in the first half of the summer term. This equates to an estimated £3.2m (based on Autumn 2024 data). The remaining approximately £2.5m will be distributed to primary phase mainstream settings, based on evidence-based application to the local authority for children who present with significant special educational needs, however, do not have an EHC Plan. Barking and Dagenham is one of the few Local Authorities which top up funding for children who do not have EHCPs.

Barking and Dagenham are historically and continue to be underfunded in relation to High Needs. Funding is too slow to follow the high numbers of children and young people who move into the borough and require a specialist place (60 in 2024). However, we are continuously working hard

to ensure children and young people are supported appropriately. We acknowledge that schools are striving to meet the needs of increasing numbers of children and young people and that they do this very well in a difficult context. The pressures are particularly felt in primary schools who have lost out under the move to a National Funding Formula.

c) Specialist Places

From September 2025 the Oxlow Bridge School (Partnership Learning Trust) is scheduled to open. This new special school setting will provide a range of specialist placements to meet the needs of children and young people 4-19 years old with profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities – some of the children with the highest learning and medical needs in the authority. The school capacity is 90 pupils, with admission of approximately 18 pupils in September 2025, rising to 30 pupils by August 2026.

Conclusion

The Local Authority will continue to work collaboratively with schools and partners to increase local specialist places, in line with our commitment to inclusive education. The model of inclusive mainstream schools, many with ARPs which support around 600 children, has been praised as an exemplar by Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education – following her visit to the borough in December.

The Director and Education team in the LA recognise the exceptional pressures of our context and the impact on schools and are working persistently with Headteachers, Schools Forum and partners, including Health, to improve and develop our services and provisions. Additional support is also provided via the Virtual SEND/Lead Professional Team. Martin Nicholson (Virtual Headteacher for SEND) and Joy Barter (Head of Early Years) are a point of contact for Headteachers where they need advice and support for children with high needs in mainstream schools.

Contact Officer:

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Background Information:

Solving the SEND Crisis Inquiry: [Solving the SEND Crisis - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

