

# Return from Collapse

— How The Learning Trust Succeeded in Improving Education in Hackney —

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## Introduction

It is a great privilege for me to be here to talk to you today and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Hiroko Hirose for inviting me to speak to you, and for making the arrangements for me to be here.

Hiroko has become a good friend to Hackney and, in particular, The Learning Trust. We value her enthusiasm for what we have achieved, and the insights she has brought as an observer with an international perspective.

No one who has been engaged in education can be indifferent to learning! And there is much that we in England can learn from Japan's approach to education.

We will, after all, be learning from one of the most successful countries in the world. In successive international assessment tests, including the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) Japan's fourth- and eighth-grade students have consistently ranked in the top five globally for both mathematics and science – both of which are areas where English students do less well.

As a recent OECD report has noted: "Japan can pride itself to have achieved far better educational outcomes than most other OECD countries".

Japan's reputation as one of the OECD's most successful nations in education and innovation is deeply impressive.

The fact that Japan has consistently been ranked at or near the top of those international league tables measuring education outcomes is a testament to your willingness to reform your education system in order to meet the changing circumstances of the world in which we live.

It is based upon a clear-sighted view of what future skills will be needed to successfully compete in the globalised world.

These reforms are truly impressive.

From the perspective of England, where reforms to education are frequently politicised and where debate often focuses on structures, rather than the quality of teaching and learning,

Japan's willingness to look at the fundamental requirements of an education system in the Twenty-first century is refreshing.

What is equally impressive are the values that are at the heart of education in Japan. Equity in education is enshrined in the Japanese Constitution, and the Basic Education Act.

The deep and abiding commitment to children, their wellbeing and their potential; investing in first class teaching; judicious use of resources and a curriculum that has at its heart a commitment to high standards.

I doubt anyone here would argue that learning begins and ends at school. Education is the journey of a lifetime.

How do we instil in young people a receptiveness and enthusiasm for learning?

How we equip people with the skills to build and develop their futures and contribute to our economies?

I look forward to hearing your ideas about these questions.

Over the past decade, Japan has made the transition to a decentralised education system.

How teachers and pupils, schools and colleges, local communities and local government take shared responsibility for the leadership of this new system will be the subject of keen interest in many parts of the world, not least in the UK, and Hackney, where the trend has been strongly towards increased school autonomy for some time, and is accelerating.

In particular, how talented teachers can be encouraged to teach in challenging classrooms, and how the most capable heads are placed in the schools most in need of effective leadership?

So, while I have been invited here to deliver a lecture, I am also keenly interested to listen to and learn from you about the ways in which we can address these challenges in ways that can deliver a high quality education for all children and young people.

### Aims of the lectures

Today I will be speaking to you twice! In this lecture I will be talking about how The Learning Trust succeeded in improving education in Hackney, following more than a decade in which standards of teaching and learning and pupil attainment declined.

This afternoon – after we've fortified ourselves with lunch – I will speak about the lessons learnt in Hackney over the ten years of The Learning Trust's contract and since then. I will outline some of the lessons learnt in Hackney that can be applied to other education systems.

I begin this lecture by setting out the circumstances which led to The Learning Trust being created, and the vision that we established for improving schools and raising achievement.

How effective was our vision for improving education in Hackney? To answer this question, I examine the following key areas:

1. How The Learning Trust helped to build leadership in schools;
2. How the Trust supported teacher recruitment;
3. How we closed failing schools; and
4. How opened new schools and refurbished and rebuilt existing schools.
5. The Learning Trust's record in raising standards and increasing pupil attainment.

Let me begin by briefly setting out for you the context in which The Learning Trust was created.

### 1. Hackney context

The background paper *The Learning Trust: A Model for School Improvement* - which I hope you have all received - provides a much greater level of detail about the long-term under performance of schools in Hackney, and the debilitating political and financial circumstances which reached crisis point in the period 1998-2002, and which led to headteachers making 'an unprecedented request' to be removed from the control of the Local Education Authority (LEA).

Let me begin by briefly setting out the context in which The Learning Trust was created.

By the end of the 1990s Hackney Council's financial and corporate weaknesses were having a detrimental impact on education provision in the borough, as well as on other local services.

Between 1997 and 2000, Ofsted was called upon to inspect Hackney LEA on three occasions, which indicates the degree of significant concern for the state of education in the borough, and the misgivings about the Council's capacity to address the weaknesses identified.

In 1997 Ofsted's inspection report was sharply critical of Hackney LEA claiming: "For the last 18 months the Authority has been in a state of disarray". Ofsted concluded that the fundamental reason for this was a "failure of political will."

Less than two years later, Ofsted conducted a second inspection in Hackney.

The report's conclusion was equally stark. Hackney was, "an LEA, which is failing, well over a year after a highly critical first inspection, to provide key elements of the help which schools need." The report noted the "negative effects of the lack of a clear priority for education in the council's strategic planning and the poor service provided by the council's systems on finance, information and communication technology and in the management of central trading units".

Ofsted's third inspection, in 2000, took place against the background of the rapid deterioration in Hackney's financial situation.

The council's treasurer issued a notice under section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 on 17 October 2000 putting a stop to all uncommitted expenditure.

Ofsted commented that "The council's spending was out of control and well beyond its financial

resources”.

The conclusion Ofsted reached in 2000 was stark:

*We do not believe that Hackney LEA has the capacity to provide a secure, stable context for continuous educational improvement. The time has come for radical change.*

The Learning Trust embodied that radical change.

Let me set out for you what made The Learning Trust different from previous interventions by the government in local education authorities.

### 1. 1 The Learning Trust

The Learning Trust was a unique organisation.

Unique in both the circumstances in which it was created, and in the scope of its responsibilities. Unique, too, in the way it was organised and in how it operated.

For ten years, from 1 August 2002 until 31 July 2012 the education services in the London Borough of Hackney were managed by The Learning Trust, a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee and independent of Hackney Council.

The creation of The Learning Trust was the direct result of the combination of poor educational performance in Hackney's schools, the chaotic political leadership in Hackney council, and the weakness of Hackney's finances. The government was compelled to intervene; it did so by taking responsibility for education away from Hackney Council.

Before the creation of The Learning Trust there had been concerted efforts by both Conservative (from 1979-1997) and Labour (from 1997 onwards) governments to introduce private companies into the management of public services, including education.

In these instances, a private company would take over particular aspects of a Local Education Authority's education responsibilities – more often than not those relating to school improvement. In Hackney, for example, the private company Nord Anglia was appointed to run school improvement services in 1999.

The Learning Trust represented an altogether more ambitious scale of intervention.

We took over the full range of Hackney LEA's education services.

Whereas previous interventions had been through private, profit-making companies, The Learning Trust was established as a not-for-profit company – a new model for delivering public services. The Trust was independent of political influence and would be able to reinvest any financial surpluses in education services.

It is important to understand the differences between the creation of The Learning Trust and the Government's previous interventions in LEAs.

Establishing the length of the contract for ten years was an important feature. Previously, the

Government had directed LEAs to enter into contracts with private companies lasting for three or five years; Nord Anglia's school improvement contract with Hackney was for three years.

Ten years provided a sufficient period of time to bring stability to education in Hackney; to address the immediate underperformance in schools and also build a sustainable system with the capacity to support and challenge schools, promote the quality of leadership and address the underlying weaknesses in education provision in the borough.

Previous interventions had seen parts of LEAs functions transferred to a private company. In the case of Hackney, Nord Anglia had been appointed to run the school improvement service in 1999. The Learning Trust was given responsibility for the entirety of education services in Hackney providing strategic coherence to service improvement.

As an organisation, TLT had a single focus - improving education across the board.

Sir Mike Tomlinson encapsulated the importance of having a ten-year contract when he said that the Trust had to be able to see a child through the every stage in the education system - from nursery to secondary school.

The Learning Trust was an innovation, a twenty-first century model for the delivery of public services: a not-for-profit company, administering the entirety of a Council's education services with a clearly defined remit to improve these, with the necessary freedom from local bureaucracy and political intrusion to achieve this goal.

Although it was established as a private company, The Learning Trust did not operate in a commercial competitive market and it was not motivated by the need to make a profit or pay shareholders a dividend.

Previous interventions in LEAs had aroused controversy due to the private company making a profit from the state education system. This was not the case with The Learning Trust.

Financial stability, which had been a major cause of concern for headteachers in the context of the Council's financial difficulties, was provided through the contract TLT had with Hackney Council, which protected the established education budget by passing it over to the Trust to manage.

Any surplus generated through the organisation's efficient financial management was recycled, invested to meet the education priorities in the borough.

As a company, The Learning Trust had a board of directors, the range and diversity of whose membership was designed to guarantee that the ideas and views of key partners were represented in the decision-making process.

With three headteachers and three chairs of school governing bodies, representation from the schools community formed the largest group on the Board.

In addition, the Cabinet Lead Member for Children & Young People and the Chief Executive

represented Hackney Council. In TLT's last years, the Mayor of Hackney also occupied a seat on the Board.

A number of independent Non-Executive directors were appointed, enabling the Trust to draw upon valuable experience from across education and government, business and the law, the police and the voluntary sector. Sir Mike Tomlinson, was later to observe:

*The board was hugely representative of the local community... There was a synergy about it and in the end we got a board that was wide-ranging in its composition in terms of the community at large and also single-minded. The single-mindedness was that we were concerned with one thing and one thing only – education in Hackney from the cradle to the grave.*

Improving education was our sole purpose, and it became the Trust's moral purpose as we established our vision for improving education.

## 1.2 The vision for improving education

The vision for The Learning Trust was that it would be one of the most effective providers of education services in the country.

Our moral purpose was:

*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.*

Given the recent past in Hackney this was ambitious, yet this scale of ambition was necessary if the challenges that existed in 2002 were to be addressed.

The philosopher RH Tawney once described the fundamental principle of education policy: "What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children".

Hackney parents wanted the best education for their children and, if they were in a position to do so, would often place their sons and daughters in schools outside of Hackney.

Four out of ten children in Year 6 of primary school either transferred to a private or non-Hackney secondary school. They voted with their feet and it was a vote of no confidence in the borough.

The Learning Trust's role was to ensure that all children in Hackney schools received high quality teaching. That every child could learn in first class buildings, using modern equipment.

The vision TLT developed for education in Hackney was that the needs and aspirations of

every learner would be met and that every school would be excellent.

There were seven objectives within this vision, which reflected the national demands placed on Local Education Authorities by central government, as well as our local priorities.

1. To improve pupil achievement, which was measured year on year in Key Stage tests, and to do so be benchmarking our schools' performance against regional and national comparisons;
2. To support our early years providers in delivering high quality teaching and learning, so children, from a young age, had the best possible start in life;
3. To encourage and support engagement and inclusion in education to ensure that economic disadvantage or disability did not prevent children and young people from fulfilling their potential;
4. To ensure that the Trust's investment in infrastructure promoted the delivery of high quality services to all education providers and across the Trust as an organisation;
5. To maximise the Trust's financial freedom in order to ensure appropriate levels of investment in education were maintained, and additional resources could be directed to meet priorities;
6. To invest in the professional development of teaching staff and professionals working at The Learning Trust, in order to recruit and retain high quality, committed people;
7. To promote the Trust's voice in education leadership through effective communication and consultation with all our stakeholders.

From the beginning I wanted to emphasise to headteachers, and the wider education community, the need for stability – not very easy when Heads regarded the Education Department as disintegrating and the Council was viewed as being financially and politically bankrupt!

To begin with, I wanted to build an honest, constructive dialogue with schools, based on the view that they had the principal responsibility for pupils, but that we all share an obligation to ensure pupil wellbeing and academic success.

As Michael Barber has argued: “school improvement is a task for the schools”.

The task for The Learning Trust, as I saw it, was to support and build school leadership to make sure schools were in a position to improve.

## 2. Building school leadership

Chris Woodhead articulated the feeling of many schools in Hackney when he observed that the schools that did well in Hackney did so *despite* Hackney Education Authority. It was important that this could not be said of The Learning Trust.

Effective school leadership is a crucial element in school improvement, however, in isolation, it is not sufficient to ensure a school is successful.

To ensure sustained improvement across Hackney, a strategy combining the promotion of effective leadership in schools, with high quality, sustained support was required.

School leaders play the key role in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including the proactive school ethos, supporting and enhancing staff motivation and building the commitment needed to promote improvement and success for schools in challenging circumstances.

School leaders and local authorities can work collectively to ensure the following challenges are met:

1. Ensuring consistently good teaching and learning;
2. Strategically managing resources and ensuring the environment in which teachers work and pupils learn is suitable; and
3. Developing partnerships beyond a single school to embrace a wider community, to encourage parental support and partnerships with other schools to provide new learning opportunities.

A comparative analysis of Ofsted school inspection judgements demonstrates the effectiveness of our focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning, combined with the priority we gave to strengthening schools' leadership proved highly effective.

There was a marked improvement between the first two years of TLT and the last two years. Between 2002 - 2004 Ofsted inspected thirty-one Hackney primary schools. Of these just over half (52%) were rated either good or outstanding in both the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of school leadership and management. Two schools - 7% of those schools inspected- were judged to be outstanding on these two measures.

Between 2010 - 2012, Ofsted inspected thirty-nine Hackney primary schools. Of these nearly four-fifths (79%) were rated either good or outstanding in both the quality of teaching and effectiveness of school leadership and management. Twelve schools - 31% of those inspected - were judged to be outstanding on these two measures.

As the Ofsted data implies, raising the quality of teaching and learning, and school leadership can only be done over time - another reason why the Trust's 10-year contract was invaluable. Schools knew that the Trust was there for the long-term, and that our central focus on improving standards was not going to be cut short or diverted.

We were their partner in making progress, and championing a moral purpose for every child in the Borough.

Where a headteacher or the governing body of a school were found to be inadequate to the



task of improving their school TLT took decisive action. We became increasingly confident in using our statutory powers, for example, suspending delegation or insisting that a headteacher leave the school.

These were not easy decisions, in some cases they aroused controversy with school staff, parents, governors and the unions, but they were the correct decisions to ensure that pupils were not condemned to years of inadequate teaching.

As Director of Education, Chief Executive of The Learning Trust and Director of Children's Services, I maintained a close involvement in the appointment of new Headteachers, particularly where the Trust, or Ofsted had identified weaknesses in the school.

In some instances we had to intervene to prevent a governing body appointing a new headteacher who we thought would not be able to lead their school to success.

These were not always easy decisions, in some instances they strained the Trust's relationship with the school in question, but the relationship never broke down.

The quality of Headteacher leadership became increasingly evident through Ofsted inspections and the wider education community recognised that this was one of the major factors in the sustained improvement of Hackney's schools.

We had the further advantage of being a comparatively small borough, which enabled us to develop both a one-to-one relationship with each school and setting, as well as encouraging schools to work together to share good practice, pool resources and develop mentoring arrangements.

Developing intellectual capacity and encouraging openness to fresh ideas was a key to the Trust's success.

The ideas of Michael Fullen, Michael Barber, Andy Hargreaves, and others have informed our thinking as we sought to apply fresh perspectives to the challenges of raising attainment.

It was also something we promoted for schools, as part of the professional development offer for Headteachers.

Groups of Hackney headteachers had the opportunity to visit Ontario, Helsinki, Shanghai, and Phoenix, Arizona to learn from the experiences of other education systems, visiting schools, meeting school leaders and attending conferences and seminars.

In addition, educators and researchers – from Sweden, Turkey, Finland, Japan, China, the United States and Vietnam – have been invited to Hackney, to visit schools and discuss innovations in education.

These trips were not without controversy. There was some colourful media interest in a trip a party of headteachers made to Arizona in 2007 – the implication being that they were on a holiday, rather than learning about how schools in Phoenix had raised levels of literacy.

I had no qualms in defending these trips. The exposure to international ideas and the opportunity to learn from other perspectives was of immense value to building intellectual capacity within our schools and The Learning Trust.

To my knowledge, no one joined a cattle ranch, or got into any saloon-bar gunfights!

### 3. Teacher recruitment

Recruiting high quality teachers was one of the priorities from the beginning of my time in Hackney. We focussed heavily on teaching and learning, leadership and management through continuing professional development. In their 2000 inspection report, Ofsted identified the need to attract more teachers to come and work in Hackney schools.

*The recruitment and retention of teachers are critical issues for the schools in Hackney. A recruitment manager has been appointed and vacancies are monitored in schools. A strategy has been put in place which is beginning to have an impact on the quality of the newly qualified teachers appointed to the LEA's pool of teachers and recruitment is taking place actively in New Zealand. However, for a substantial number of schools this remains a crucial and unresolved problem.*

Attracting quality teachers to Hackney, or any inner-city area, remains a challenge to this day. The first advertising campaign TLT ran was to recruit teachers and we made use of advertising mediums that had not been used before. For example, we advertised using posters at railway stations that were designed to catch the attention of commuters.

We also advertised in night clubs to attract the attention of young people.

A prevailing view at the time insisted that no teachers would want to work in Hackney, in other words the Borough's reputation counted against us. This proved to be largely unfounded, particularly as we developed a model of continuing professional development as the core of our recruitment campaign.

In 2003, Ofsted acknowledged the efforts we had put into recruiting teachers:

*The Learning Trust has tackled the recruitment of teachers determinedly, and this work is well received by schools...Positive recruitment strategies such as a marketing campaign to promote working in the borough, and support for additional training for teachers with overseas qualifications, are improving the situation.*

Mike Tomlinson championed continuing professional development.

As part of the package we offered teachers coming to Hackney was the opportunity to do a Master's Degree in teaching or a related education subject, in partnership with institutions such as the Institute of Education (IoE) and universities with links to East London.

"A successful urban school", Michael Barber has observed, "requires a learning staff" and we

were determined to build a reputation for investing in our teachers.

To achieve this requires a carefully planned professional development strategy which is related both to the school development plan and to the teacher appraisal scheme.

A school also needs to ensure that staff have opportunities to take part in courses and conferences away from the school, and in some cases, in higher degree courses.

Finally, it is a matter of encouraging staff to learn from events and policy initiatives and encouraging school staff to discuss issues in a collegiate fashion.

Mike was strongly of this view and he identified the need for a high quality, state of the art, professional development centre in Hackney, which would send a clear signal to teaching staff that their continuing professional development was a Trust priority.

It was entirely fitting that the Professional Development Centre in Hackney has been named The Tomlinson Centre.

The building of the Tomlinson Centre also provides a striking example of how the Trust's responsibility for its own budget enabled innovation.

This project was affordable because of the Trust's prudent, effective financial management – strict adherence to value for money efficiency savings has consistently freed up resources that have been invested in educational priorities.

As a result the Trust was able to invest £4.5million in developing the Tomlinson Centre, which was built at no cost to Hackney Council and which became a council asset when the Trust's contract expired.

#### 4. Closing failing schools

The decision to close two failing secondary schools, Kingsland and Homerton, and Laburnum, a failing primary school, were amongst the most decisive The Learning Trust made.

In doing so, we sent a clear signal to parents that Hackney was no longer willing to accept a situation where their children would be expected to attend schools that had fallen into an irreversible spiral of decline. Our decision to close these schools should be seen within the context of our secondary school improvement strategy.

The Learning Trust began by shaping a coherent strategy for improving secondary schools in Hackney.

Within the first months of the Trust being established in 2002 a series of discussions with the heads of secondary schools were held where a vision for the future was articulated.

Our case was that new schools, greater levels of investment and higher quality of teaching and attainment were needed. These discussions informed the priorities that our secondary strategy set out to achieve:

- (i) Improving standards in existing schools,
- (ii) Investing in our schools, and
- (iii) Increasing the number of school places

Both Kingsland and Homerton were schools where decline had become deeply ingrained. Their GCSE exam results were consistently poor – well below the Borough average, and well beyond touching distance of the National Average.

Over the eight years from 1996 to 2003, Kingsland pupils averaged only 21% achieving 5+A\*-C grades. From 1996 to 2005, Homerton's pupils averaged 23% achieving 5+A\*-C grades.

Pupil numbers were declining, which had a detrimental impact on both schools finances. A significant number of permanent teachers had left, which meant as many as half the lessons being taught were by temporary teaching staff.

Despite extensive support, both schools made only limited progress. Pupils from middle class backgrounds had moved to other schools, leaving those from underprivileged backgrounds and those with Special Educational Needs at failing schools.

In order to close Kingsland and Homerton efficiently, we developed a comprehensive closure plan encompassing the following priorities:

1. The appointment of a new headteacher to provide stability whilst the school closed,
2. A commitment to continuing to improve the education of those pupils at the school throughout the closure period,
3. The relocation of all Kingsland pupils in Hackney secondary schools.

Recognising that several year groups would have had their education disrupted, we also undertook to monitor all of the former Kingsland and Homerton pupils in their new schools and would have been ready to intervene with remedial support in the event of them falling behind.

Thankfully, because of our careful planning, this was not necessary.

## 5. Building schools for Hackney's future

The renewal of Hackney's existing secondary schools was a key part of achieving the Trust's objectives of improving the quality of education and persuading parents not to withdraw their children from the Borough at the point of transition from primary to secondary school.

The Learning Trust developed a pragmatic approach to increasing the number of places available, and revitalising the school estate in Hackney. Our approach was based on the following principles:

1. Providing parents with a choice of quality secondary education for their children;
2. Establishing schools as the hub of their local community; and
3. Ensuring people from all backgrounds, ethnicities and languages had equal access to the resources in the Borough's schools.

Under the government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme The Learning Trust successfully secured more than £175 million from the Department for Education & Skills to rebuild or renovate each of the secondary schools in the borough.

Our BSF Programme actively involved teachers, pupils and parents in shaping a vision for their new school, which helped to personalise the aims of BSF, which were to:

1. Raise education standards through well-designed, multipurpose buildings, with up-to-date facilities,
2. Provide easy-to-use information and communication technology to transform teaching and learning,
3. Create schools that offer facilities to the wider Hackney community.

From 2005 onwards, each of Hackney's nine Secondary Schools were renovated or entirely rebuilt. By 2015 all of Hackney's secondary and special schools have been rebuilt, or substantially renovated through Building Schools for the Future.

The Hackney BSF programme exemplifies the benefits created for children and young people in the Borough through the constructive working partnership between The Learning Trust and skilled finance officers in Hackney Council, such as Ian Williams, the director of finance, and Jackie Moylan, assistant director.

Together we maximised the advantage of unprecedented investment by central government in renovating school buildings. In doing so, a lasting legacy of first class, modern facilities has been secured for future generations of children and young people.

## 5.1 Academies Programme

Academies have been a controversial development in English education. In Hackney we adopted a realistic, pragmatic approach, which resulted in a substantial number of new secondary school places being created through the government's Academies Programme.

We understood the opposition that the Academies Programme aroused in neighbouring inner London boroughs and sought to shape the Academies to reflect 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.

Between 2005 and 2012, four Academies were created in Hackney under the government's programme:

**Mossbourne**, specialising in music, which was built on the site of the old Hackney Downs School,

**Petchey**, specialising in health, care and medical science, which was built on the site of Kingsland Secondary School,

**City**, sponsored by KPMG, specialising in business and finance, which was built on the site of Homerton College of Technology, and

**Bridge**, sponsored by UBS Ltd specialising in music and mathematics, which was built on the site of Laburnum Primary school.

A fifth academy, **Skinner's Company's School**, was created when the Skinner's Company's School for Girls closed. A new, mixed academy, sponsored by The Skinner's Company opened in 2010.

Clapton Girls Technology College became the borough's sixth academy in 2011 (Clapton Girls' Academy) under the Coalition Government's "convertor academy" programme.

Hackney's seventh academy opened in September 2014 run by Mossbourne – the first academy built in the Borough.

The academies programme has played a substantial role in raising expectations and increasing the aspirations of Hackney's young people. From the beginning of The Learning Trust's contract, secondary schools were identified as the catalysts for change, meeting the high expectations parents had for their children's education.

The strategy for improving secondary schools had two priorities:

1. Addressing the educational underachievement in a number of secondary schools,

## 2. Reversing the trend of 11 year olds opting to go to secondary schools outside Hackney.

As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of Hackney families putting a Hackney school as their first preference at secondary school transfer; correspondingly, the number of families giving schools outside Hackney their first preference has declined.

In 2012 almost 83% of Hackney parents expressed a preference for schools in the borough, compared with 65% in 2002.

The result of the opening of new schools, the expansion of existing schools and of Post-16 provision, and the closure of failing schools has been the fulfilment of our ambition: Hackney is now a place where parents want to get their children into the borough's schools.

## 6. The Learning Trust's record in raising standards and improving outcomes

The Learning Trust developed the Schools Requiring Additional Support process (SRAS) to support school improvement.

A focus on English and maths, increasing the quality of teaching and learning and monitoring pupils' progress was of paramount importance in raising standards.

The intelligent application of support from government initiatives, including national strategies, London Challenge and the 14-19 Partnership enabled The Learning Trust to build upon and expand local good practice.

The approach that we refined over the years was based on developing the talent of teaching staff in Hackney schools, with a focus on pedagogic skill, sound subject knowledge, managerial competence and critical self-review.

The Trust's 2008 Improving Standards Strategy encouraged schools to make use of their increased autonomy. Supporting school-led improvement, through strategic networks for headteachers.

Developing school leadership, and improved teaching and learning, was central to the improvements in primary and secondary schools over the last four years of the Trust's contract.

The Schools Requiring Additional Support (SRAS) process was designed to analyse school performance, assessing standards of teaching and learning, evaluating a school's capacity for making sustained progress and identifying declining trends.

The method by which this is achieved is drawing intelligence from across the widest possible range of sources: school admissions and attendance, behaviour and exclusions, finance and governor services, health and safety, Personnel and ICT, School Improvement Partners and Special Educational Needs, safeguarding and research and statistics.

Our approach was not "doing to schools", but supporting schools to improve. The approach

required a comprehensive knowledge of our schools, the ability to recognise the early warning signals that a school is getting into difficulties and building relationships with schools, based on mutual respect and constructive challenge.

Based on the collective judgements across all these service areas, schools are categorised as to the level of support they required:

1. Core Support – the standard level of support for high performing schools,
2. Enhanced Support – additional support focussing support on identified areas of weakness, and
3. Intensive Support - support for those schools likely to be judged as failing by Ofsted.

SRAS became the method by which The Learning Trust evaluated schools' performance, supported them to address identified weakness and challenged them to increase their ambition for their pupils.

It proved the central means by which we sought to improve the quality and range of education provided to Hackney's children and young people.

There gradually emerged a trend whereby our SRAS process was found to be more rigorous than Ofsted's inspection findings!

Over the period 2002 – 2012 increasing numbers of children and young people in Hackney have achieved as well as – and in some cases better than – the best elsewhere in England.

## 6. 1 Improved results in Hackney's schools

How effective was The Learning Trust's sustained support and challenge to schools in Hackney?

The improvement in results at all of the Key Stages were striking, characterised by the:

1. Strengthening and extension of Early Years provision;
2. Dramatic improvements in primary education; and
3. The transformation of secondary education.

## 6. 2 Foundation Stage Profile

By 2012, as measured by the Foundation Stage Profile, the outcomes for 5 year olds in Hackney had dramatically improved.

The attainment gap between high and low achievers had narrowed significantly, while Hackney's young children were within 1 percentage point of the National Average.

The percentage of children reaching a good level of development at the Foundation Stage in Hackney schools and settings increased by 15 percentage points over three years, from 48% in



2010 to 54% in 2011 and to 63% in 2012.

Over the same three year period, the National Average increased by 8 percentage points, from 56% in 2010 to 59% in 2011 and to 64% in 2012.

In 2006, the percentage of children reaching a good level of development at the Foundation Stage, in Hackney schools and settings was 12 percentage points below the national level.

By 2012, the percentage of children reaching a good level of development in Hackney had increased by 30 percentage points and the gap to the national level had closed to just one percentage point.

### **6.3 Key Stage 1**

The Key Stage 1 attainment gap between Hackney and the National Average more than halved as a result of The Learning Trust's emphasis on reading, writing and numeracy.

The percentage of pupils achieving Level 2+ in Key Stage 1 Reading increased from 72% in 2003 to 86% in 2012. Hackney was within 1 percentage point of the National Average.

The percentage of pupils achieving Level 2+ in Key Stage 1 Writing has increased from 69% in 2003 to 82% in 2012. Hackney was within 1 percentage point of the National Average.

The percentage of pupils achieving Level 2+ in KS1 Maths has increased from 78% in 2003 to 89% in 2012. Hackney was within 2 percentage points of the National Average.

### **6.4 Key Stage 2**

Raising attainment at Key Stage 2 has been a priority for The Learning Trust since 2002.

The progress made in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the improvements in reading, writing and numeracy at Key Stage 1 contributed to significant improvements in Key Stage 2 results.

In 2012 81% of 11 year olds in Hackney achieved Level 4+ in both English and Mathematics, which put the borough 2 percentage points above the National Average.

Hackney's rate of improvement was been significantly faster than the National Average, from 57% in 2006 to 81% in 2012 – 24 percentage points in six years. The England Average, by comparison, has risen from 70% to 79% over the same period of time.

At Key Stage 2, Hackney was the most improved borough in England over the 5-year period from 2007 – 2012.

### **6.5 Secondary Education**

In August 2002, 31% of Hackney's Year 11 pupils gained 5+A\*-C grades at GCSE.

The attainment gap between Hackney and the National Average was more than 20 percentage points.

There were only three other Local Education Authorities in England with lower results.

By 2006 – the year in which the Government adjusted the national benchmark to 5+A\*-C grades including English and Maths – Hackney had narrowed the attainment gap significantly.

The progress in Hackney secondary schools has been excellent:

The percentage of pupils achieving 5+A\*-C grades (including English and Maths) has risen consistently from 2006, reflecting a significant rate of improvement of 23 percentage points (from 37% in 2006 to 60% in 2012) .

The percentage of pupils achieving 5+A\*-C grades has risen from 31% in 2002 to 79% in 2012, an improvement of 48 percentage points over ten years.

## 7. Conclusion

At the end of ten years we had improved the outcomes for children and young people at all levels of education.

Against the historical background of low educational attainment in an economically deprived inner London borough, the Trust succeeded spectacularly in raising attainment, improving standards and widening choices for the children and young people in Hackney.

In a speech delivered in Hackney in February 2010, the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown recognised the fact that we had achieved: “the largest improvement in secondary school standards of any local authority in the country since 1998”.

Between 2002 and 2012 The Learning Trust achieved what many commentators – including some in Hackney - had believed impossible. We had improved standards of education in the Borough to the point where our schools were among the most improved in England.

Where Hackney was once regarded as irredeemable, we were able to show that education could be decisively improved, in a sustained way, in schools across in the Borough.

We demonstrated that high levels of deprivation was not a credible reason for having low expectations of the children in our schools; that high ambition wasn't a privilege for some pupils in a few schools, but a necessity for all pupils in every school.

This was a collective achievement, based on the passionate commitment of many teachers and Trust staff, all of whom were determined to make sure children and young people in Hackney got the high quality education they deserved.

In doing so, we restored public confidence in an education system that was regarded as broken, and which had become an excuse for low aspirations.

None of us was prepared to accept that Hackney's record of past failure should consign future generations to a similar fate. We challenged ourselves, and others – teachers, governors, parents and pupils - to do better, to achieve ever greater things and never accept second best.

I'm proud to say that I was part of that radical change.