
Youth Violence Task Force

Overview and context

As teachers, we are aware that a gang culture exists in Camden. We recognise that gangs are a reality and that this can have devastating and sometimes tragic consequences for some young people growing up in the borough.

We think it is important to note that gangs within Camden are not necessarily from one ethnic group. Whilst recent tragic events in the borough have involved young people from the Somali community, gang culture within Camden is variable involving young people from different backgrounds and changing over time.

We feel that the situation is worsened by cuts which have been made to a variety of services and public-sector organisations over recent years and that properly funded local services would have a positive impact in tackling these issues throughout Camden.

In Camden, there have been huge cuts to youth services over recent years. Between 2012 and 2017, there was a 25% decrease in funding for youth services with funding falling from £3,185,398 to £2,401,699. This budget was set to fall by a further 26% in 2017 – 18.

Reductions in Youth Centre Projects and Youth Workers have left many young people without the connections and support they require in order to be able to engage in the community. We need to be able to provide young people with fully funded services which enable them to build connections, learn new skills, be creative and enjoy a social life, outside their homes, while they grow into adulthood.

Also essential is the opportunity for young people, from all backgrounds, to be able to access support and services to allow them to tackle issues around mental health by working with professionals in this field.

At the same time as youth services being cut, we have also seen real-terms funding cuts to the education system. These cuts have caused huge loss of staff in many schools and contribute to gang- culture perpetuating.

We have to understand that the Camden community is very diverse. The percentage of Camden Primary Pupils on Free School Meals last year was 26.8%, compared to a London average of 15.7% and the Secondary figures are very similar. More significantly, 52.5% of our Secondary School children speak English only as an additional language. That compares to 41.5% in London and just 16.2% across all of England. These figures show that Camden children are both diverse

and high in poverty. Many of them come from countries where they have had disrupted schooling and in some cases without both parents.

Suggested changes

Clearly the main reason why there is knife crime is because many of these young people carry knives. If they didn't carry knives, there would still be fights, but they wouldn't be as harmful. Clearly, we need to address both issues, the culture that leads to violence and fighting and the fact that knives are being carried.

In the early part of the 21st century, the Directed Schools Grant that funds schools was split into a number of ring-fenced funding pools. One of these was for what was called an Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS). This funded EMAS teachers in the local authority and in some of the schools – particularly secondary schools like Haverstock and Regent High School. The EMAS teachers fulfilled the important role of working with new arrivals, in small groups, with language acquisition and settling them into school. There were also Refugee Co-ordinators and Community Link Workers funded through this who would spend half their time in school and half their time in the community.

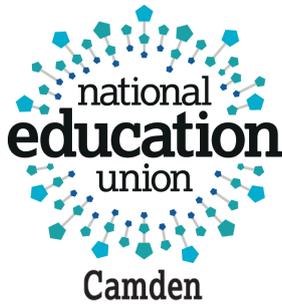
This would seem to be something that could have a very positive impact again in Camden.

Other education cuts, along with a narrowing curriculum as a result of an obsession with testing within schools, have also left many schools without high quality, regular PSHE and Citizenship learning available for students.

It is vitally important that schools are supported in developing highly effective, well-resourced PSHE and Citizenship departments. Within such departments student would have the space and time to explore a variety of complex issues and ideas, along with educational professionals, and in doing so be better equipped to make sense of the world they live in and their own place within it.

There are good PSHE programmes in schools, but cuts have limited the amount that schools are able to deliver, the amount of external people (for example ex-convicts or victims of knife crime) that can come in and deliver PSHE and the scope of students that we are able to deliver this too.

Finally, it's vital that after our children leave school at the end of the day there are activities available for them. Not an extended school scenario, or revision, because children need a break from their Academic studies. They need places to study and work available and open to them, but they also need alternative activities. These could include games, social activities or informal training. Cookery skills for example, or Automotive engineering. It is an academic platform, with structure and aspiration that our young people need. Some of this we can deliver in schools, some of this we can't.



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A vital part of high-quality PSHE provision needs to be E-Safety and education around social media, ensuring that young people also know where they can turn in order to deal with cyber bullying. It is also vitally important that schools are supported in ensuring they have the resources and expertise in order to support students in gaining this confidence and understanding. Effective education around the use of social media needs to include parents and carers, so that they too can work in collaboration with schools to develop an understanding of how their children may be using social media and how this may make them vulnerable.

It is our understanding that young people in Camden are using Social Media to organise fights. It is important that social media platforms, such as Snapchat, have a clear understanding of the reality how the service they provide is being used by young people. When it arises, that certain platforms are used negatively as part of a bullying culture and when their specific features benefit this culture enabling it to perpetuate, then these companies must be made aware of this and held accountable.

The importance of adequate funding from the Government, both to schools and to Local Authorities cannot be underestimated. A continued lack of adequate funding, along with increasing accountability and academic pressures in schools, will leave Camden schools in a situation where they cannot properly meet the needs of the young people they teach. Adequate funding will enable Camden schools to provide high quality education and pastoral care to their diverse communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to come and speak to you about any of these things or to send representatives from our members. Please don't hesitate to get in contact.

Gerald Clark
Division Secretary
18 March 2018

