

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Education Board	Dated: 23/09/2025
Subject: Outcome of Research Projects 2024/25	Public report: For Information
This proposal: • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides business enabling functions	Diverse Engaged Communities Vibrant Thriving Destination Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
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Summary

This report brings together the two Education Board–commissioned research projects (SEND best practice; parental experiences and the role of parents in shaping music education) into a single report with separate appendices for each study. Both pieces were approved by Members following the Education Board meeting on 9 October 2024 and were funded at £10,000 each. The projects were selected to deliver rigorous, policy-relevant evidence in support of the Education Strategy 2024–29 priority Supporting Educational Excellence, and to ensure the Board’s activity remains evidence-driven and responsive to the needs of pupils, families and schools.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In 2024, Members of the Education Board and Policy & Resources Committee approved the City of London Corporation’s Education Strategy 2024–29. One of the Strategy’s five priorities is ‘Supporting Educational Excellence’, which includes the action:

“Through research and collaboration, we will connect City-linked educators with leading-edge thinking, practices and opportunities that support innovation in education – with a particular focus on supporting learners who do not have equal access and those with SEND”

2. At the Education Board meeting on 9 October 2024, the Education Strategy Unit (ESU) presented a menu of research proposals and Members voted to fund two projects: (1) a study of best practice in SEND, and (2) research into parental experiences and the role of parents in shaping the future of music education. These projects were selected not only because they align with the latest peer-reviewed evidence and emerging government policy, but also because they speak directly to areas where the Board has committed significant financial investment across its family of schools and cultural partners. Despite this investment, there remain clear gaps in the wider evidence base, particularly around what constitutes effective practice in SEND provision and how parental engagement can best support sustained participation in music education. By commissioning these projects, the Education Board is ensuring that its strategic funding decisions are underpinned by robust and timely research, filling known evidence gaps and providing Members with actionable insights to inform future policy, practice, and investment decisions.
3. After a stakeholder analysis, the ESU partnered with high-quality academic teams across London to deliver the work: the SEND study was carried out with Brunel University (two professors) together with a professor from King’s College,

London; the music/parental engagement study was undertaken by research staff at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

4. A note on scale and value: each project was funded at circa £10,000. This level of support was deliberately modest; even small university-commissioned projects in London, once staff time, indirect (TRAC/FEC) and estates costs are included, commonly run into the tens of thousands of pounds. Universities apply full economic costing principles for research work and recommended academic consultancy rates (daily and project) mean that a £10k commission represents a targeted, cost-efficient model for securing high-quality academic input at short notice.

Current Position

5. Research activity for both projects commenced in early 2025 and concluded at the end of the summer term 2025. Members will find the full reports attached as **Appendix One (SEND First pilot study)** and **Appendix Two (Parents & Music Education)**. Below are the headline points on delivery and dissemination:
 - Both projects were delivered on time and within the £10k budgets.
 - Both research projects cleared full ethical clearance at institutional level, in line with Higher Education research governance standards.
 - Findings have been peer-reviewed by the academic teams and prepared for dissemination to policymakers and practitioner audiences.
 - The SEND project has attracted interest from central government as well as the wider academic community. Academics at Kings College, London and Brunel University are now preparing to further scale the SEND First evaluation into a competitive funding bid in collaboration with CoLAT and the CoLC.
 - The music/parents research has generated interest across the music education sector (conservatoires, music hubs, charities and APPGs) and a funding approach to support a policy-focused roundtable has been prepared.

Key findings

SEND First pilot study:

6. Evidence identifies a set of scalable practices where a “SEND-First” approach improves inclusion and outcomes; a case-study academy within CoLAT demonstrates promising impact on disadvantaged cohorts and inclusion metrics.
7. Student understanding & confidence: Most students (79%) know about SEND support, though curriculum differentiation is less clear. Confidence is high with teachers/TAs (68%+) but lower with behaviour mentors or extracurriculars.
8. Support & resources: Students value personalised adjustments (laptops, extra time, clear instructions, knowledge organisers) and more TA support. Enrichment and revision clubs help but are patchy.
9. Engagement & environment: Musically/academically supported students feel safe and motivated. Clearer communication, more resources, and consistent SEND adjustments are needed.

10. Staff knowledge & practice: Almost all staff understand SEND First (97%) and value inclusivity (92%). Training and strategies (dual-coding, learning profiles) are strong but inconsistent across departments. Small nurture groups, differentiated teaching, pastoral routines, and TA support are key strengths; funding cuts threaten some provisions. Behaviour policy inconsistencies frustrate students.
11. Staff recommendations: Greater consistency in SEND First, differentiated homework/assessment, and interactive, creative teaching approaches.
12. Parent confidence & support: Parents feel confident in attendance (82%) and engaging with staff (64%), less in homework support (46%). Most feel children's SEND needs are supported.
13. Parent priorities: More TA support, resources, recognition of effort, improved communication (earlier meetings, consistent contacts), engaging homework, small group and visual teaching strategies.

Parents, Pathways & Music Education:

14. Financial support for tuition, instruments, travel, and auditions is crucial; without it, many students cannot progress to conservatoire level. Parents often make significant sacrifices, sometimes prioritising music over other household needs. Scholarships and bursaries are vital for students from low-income households.
15. Practical support, including transport, scheduling, and administrative help with auditions or scholarships, is essential but time-intensive. Emotional encouragement builds confidence and resilience; its absence can lead to secrecy, disengagement, or self-doubt. Support for practice works best when it balances structure with autonomy.
16. A musically rich home environment, with exposure to varied genres, live music, and accessible instruments, supports natural progression. Conversations about music and shared family activities strengthen engagement. Immersion is effective even if parents are not musicians, provided there is genuine enthusiasm.
17. Strong communication between parents, teachers, and students improves practice, consistency, and motivation. Parents attending or engaging in lessons gain better understanding of expectations, while respectful alignment with teachers reduces stress and avoids overstepping. Weak communication limits parental effectiveness.
18. Children's musical interests and instruments change over time. Flexible, autonomy-supportive parenting fosters motivation, independence, and resilience. Excessive pressure risks burnout and strained relationships. Parents who balance encouragement with space for growth maintain enjoyment and identity.
19. Musical expertise is not essential; emotional investment, availability, and practical support are equally valuable. Non-musical parents can attend concerts, celebrate achievements, and provide guidance on performance and confidence. Awareness of pathways and advocacy is critical, particularly where school provision is limited.
20. Recommendations include: identifying students with limited parental support, early intervention for under-18s, strengthening parent-teacher communication, flexible teaching for instrument or genre changes, expanding outreach to non-musical families and state schools, and addressing systemic inequities through funding, training, and further research.

Proposal

21. Members are asked to note the following recommended next steps, reflecting demand from the sector and opportunities to translate evidence into policy and practice:

- **SEND roundtable (winter 2025/26)**- convene a high-profile stakeholder roundtable (Central Government officials, elected Members, CoLAT senior officers, MAT and headteacher representatives, charity leaders, parents/carers and academics) to discuss “what works” and to feed into the Government’s impending SEND White Paper and related policy conversations (timing to align with the White Paper timetable).
- **Nuffield Foundation bid** - progress an application (led by CoLC, CoLAT and academic partners) to fund a larger, longitudinal evaluation of the SEND-First model across CoLAT. If successful, this will not require any further funding or resource from the CoLC.
- **Music sector roundtable & broader literature review** - convene a roundtable to present GSMDs findings alongside a commissioned literature synthesis to produce actionable recommendations for music hubs, conservatoires and national policymakers. Senior officers at the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) have shown interest in chairing this session.
- **Policy engagement & publication** - publish short policy briefs summarising key findings and recommendations from both projects; proactively brief DfE, relevant APPGs and sector bodies (music hubs, ABRSM, conservatoires) and share learning with City Family of Schools and wider education community across the City of London and beyond.
- **Internal learning & alignment** - incorporate findings into Education Strategy Unit operational plans (Cultural & Creative Learning Fund spend, City Premium activity) to ensure grant programmes and pupil support are aligned with evidence-based interventions on what works, what works best and also, what does not work.

Key Data

22. Embedded in the report and available in the Appendices of this report.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – The projects directly support delivery of the Education Strategy 2024–29, particularly the priority *Supporting Educational Excellence*. They also contribute to the City Corporation’s wider Corporate Plan 2024-29 ambitions on learning, inclusion, and community impact.

Financial implications – Each project was funded at £10,000 from existing Education Board budgets. No additional funding is required. Relevant advice was sought from Commercial Services in relation to commissioning the research.

Resource implications – The projects were managed within existing ESU officer capacity, with support from external academic partners. Proposed next steps (policy briefs, engagement events) will be delivered from existing resource, supplemented by external partners where appropriate.

Legal implications – none identified.

Risk implications – Risks are low. Potential reputational risk exists if findings are not disseminated effectively or if expectations around future policy impact are not managed. These risks are being mitigated through clear communication, structured engagement, and proactive alignment with government policy timetables.

Equalities implications – Both projects directly address equality of access: the SEND study focuses on inclusive provision, while the music/parents project explores socio-economic and cultural barriers to participation. Findings will inform future work to improve equality of opportunity across the City Family of Schools and cultural partners.

Climate implications – Minimal direct impact. Dissemination events will be planned with regard to sustainability (e.g. hybrid/online engagement to reduce travel).

Security implications – None identified beyond normal data protection standards. All research activity complied with GDPR and institutional data security protocols.

Conclusion

23. Both research projects delivered high-quality, timely evidence that aligns directly with the Education Strategy 2024–29 and the City Corporation’s wider commitment to educational excellence. The studies were deliberately cost-efficient (each funded at £10k), yet have already generated significant external interest. Crucially, these projects were prioritised because they address areas where the Education Board has made substantial financial investment but where gaps in the wider evidence base persist. By targeting these gaps, the research ensures that the Board’s investment is underpinned by robust evidence of what works, and for whom, in practice.

The ESU will proceed with the proposed engagement and funding steps outlined above to maximise the practical and policy impact of both research projects, and will provide Members with a further update following the roundtables and any successful external funding decisions. In this way, the Board’s initial investment is positioned to leverage wider influence, support more effective use of resources, and strengthen the City Corporation’s leadership role in shaping evidence-based education policy and practice.

Appendices

- Appendix One: SEND First Case Study
- Appendix Two: A Reflective Study: The Impact of Parental/Carer Support on a Young Person’s Progression Through Music Education

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