

The third of our Inspiring Minds breakfasts featured Colin Diamond CBE, executive director of education at Birmingham City Council as the guest speaker. Colin has worked in education leadership roles for over 30 years. He has been a teacher, youth worker and child psychotherapist in inner-London.

He has also worked as a local authority SEND adviser, Director of Education, Director of Children's Services, OfSTED inspector and associate lecturer at three universities. He was DCSF South West Director and then moved to DfE, where he headed up the Department's education advisers for academies and free schools and then took on responsibility for the performance of open academies.

His arrival in Birmingham was billed as a Government troubleshooter, sent to Birmingham to oversee school improvements in the wake of Trojan Horse and the title of his presentation to the Lunar Society was 'The Secret Successes of Birmingham's Schools Three Years on from Trojan Horse'.

Colin gave us the background to Trojan Horse and how perceptions of Birmingham's education system and facilities – both within the city and wider afield – were negative, causing difficulties for city children, school staff and local communities.

Three years later, Birmingham school children are tracking, or only just below, the national average and, in some cases, are slightly above the national average across a range of assessed criteria. The city is top or in second place of the core cities in GCSE results and amongst the best in the country when it comes to A level results. These figures are despite the fact that Birmingham has twice the national average of deprivation and the highest level of pupil mobility in the country.

One of the reasons for this dramatic improvement is, according to Colin Diamond, the fact that Birmingham has a 'huge pool of exemplary leaders' to motivate its 205,000 pupils and 447 schools, including nurseries and that Birmingham has a strong city identity, which it values and wishes to preserve.

He believes that the fact there has not been a rise in hate crimes in Birmingham schools since the Bataclan attack in Paris in 2015, which goes against the trend in several other key cities in England, is because local policies are being successful in the encouragement of young people to grow up together, unite and socialise through a wide range of activities including music and sport. Music provision, a £6m service, was described as the city's 'jewel in the crown'.

The following discussion included the possible expansion of grammar schools within the education system, training young people for work rather than higher education to meet the needs of future employers, how micro management of the assessment process for six and seven year olds may not be desirable or useful and whether provision of free school meals was a good use of public money.

It was an informative, engaging and entertaining talk and discussion, highlighting the achievements of Birmingham schools, teachers and pupils and illustrating the successes now seen and the desire to move onwards and upwards to benefit forthcoming generations.