

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 30 November 2016

School Standards Monitoring Group

1. The School Standard Monitoring Group (SSMG) is a strategic body on which the Executive Member of Learning and Skills and the Director for Wellbeing, Care and learning sit. They are supported by other councillors such as the Chair of the Education Scrutiny committee and Local Authority officers namely the Assistant Director for Learning and Skills and the Head of Achievement. This term the group have met with schools causing concern to share each school's successes and the challenges it faces, discuss support which can be offered and challenge leadership decisions made to improve learning which may not have seen sufficient uplift in outcomes.
2. The SSMG group have met with 10 schools and will continue to hold further meetings into the Autumn term. Schools come to the meeting well-prepared to discuss the finer detail of their school improvement needs. We have been able to offer support such as CPD, monitoring of teaching and learning, brokering expertise from other sources, Early Help intervention and additional support to ensure the learning environment is appropriate for the needs of the pupils and even police support where community behaviour has been detrimental to children's learning.
3. The schools are chosen where they appear on the lower levels in terms of attainment across a number of key stages and/or progress has not shown sufficient development. It should be noted that very few of our schools have recognised issues around progress whilst measures to close the gap with National averages are centred largely on the achievement of boys, disadvantaged pupils and those with English as an Additional Language. These themes will now be taken forward in our wider school improvement planning.
4. Schools have responded very positively to the opportunity to seek further support and to be questioned on their leadership decisions. One comment from a Chair of Governors was that he was impressed with the level of challenge and professionalism at the meeting. Some Head teachers have been quick to send thanks for the extra support received as a result of the meeting.

School Improvement Training

5. Lee Owston, HMI, worked with school leaders to review their monitoring practices 'Through the lens of short inspection'. This event was very well attended by senior leaders and is beginning to influence practice linked to book scrutiny and identifying progress in pupils' work. Lee has agreed to do a second session later this term so that Heads that were not able to attend the initial session have an opportunity to attend. There are also plans to run a similar session to target EYFS and maths. Governors have attended training focused on performance management of head teachers and what to look for when monitoring school performance.

Now that the Education for All bill has been dropped we must consider what this means for the Future of Middlesbrough School Improvement. We are currently awaiting announcements from Government on this.

6. Justine Greening has announced she will shelve plans to force all schools in "unviable or underperforming" council areas into academies, which many are interpreting to mean that the government has dropped the Education for All bill legislation altogether. Greening revealed her intentions in a written statement to Parliament on 27th October. She said there will be no changes to education legislation in this Parliamentary session, which will run until next summer.
7. It will be some time before it is clear which if any of the elements from the bill will be rolled forwards into new legislation which will be needed to introduce the government's grammar school proposals.
8. There is currently a consultation which will be used to develop the new bill, the closing date being mid-December. We are encouraging Middlesbrough Head teachers to respond and will be sending a Local Authority response.
9. In the meantime our plans to continue to support school improvement will move ahead. On the 21st of November, Middlesbrough Head teachers and Chairs of Governors will meet for a one-day event with Local Authority officers to evaluate the needs of Middlesbrough schools and consider the best use of the investment from Middlesbrough Council in supporting the development of a system of school improvement to take us forward over the next decade. Our vision will be to further embed an inclusive system of education based upon best practice and proven outcomes, ensuring Middlesbrough schools are the best in the area. We are being supported on this development day by an external consultant, Jill Baker, who has a range of experience in leading school improvement in the North West.

SEND and VL Service

10. The SEND and VL service continues to work through the key priorities identified within strategic review undertaken by ISOS from September 2015-January 2016. Over the last few months there has been a major focus on the use of High Needs Funding which was implemented as a result of the SEND reforms. The reforms introduced by the Government in April 2013 aimed to encourage the development of high-quality and innovative provision, to improve transparency, and, particularly in relation to SEN, to empower young people and their families and to increase choice.

11. To achieve this, the Government's funding arrangements for pupils and students with high needs were intended to be responsive to the needs of individual pupils and students and supported by clear information from the local offer about the high needs provision available in schools, colleges and other providers. Furthermore, the Government wished to avoid perpetuating or creating potential perverse financial incentives that may prevent young people receiving the educational experience that is right for them.
12. The Government believed that the old funding system fell some way short of this. Since different types of providers were funded in different ways for high needs provision, the old system contained potential perverse financial incentives to place pupils and students in one type of provider over another. Furthermore, the complexity of the old funding arrangements meant:
 - It was difficult for young people and their families to understand what provision is available to them and to exercise meaningful choice.
 - The Government's funding plans for high needs provision were arranged on an equivalent basis across different types of providers.
 - It was intended that the funding arrangements would be transparent and that there was clear and accessible information about available provision for commissioners, providers, and young people and families. This was to help improve choices for young people and their families, remove potential perverse incentives, and thus ensure pupils and students with high needs get the support they need to fulfil their potential.
13. Middlesbrough Council developed and implemented their own model as did many other Local Authorities. This model is now under review with the intention, through consultation with all stakeholders, to make some adjustments which will ensure better targeted use of resources within the High Needs Budget as well as meeting the strategic priorities identified throughout the SEND review. It is hoped that this new model will be agreed and implemented by 1st April 2017

Councillor Janice Brunton
Executive Member, Education, Learning and Skills