
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 28 June 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors L Mason (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, D Jones, T Mawston, D McCabe, M Nugent, M Saunders, P Storey and G Wilson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S Hill (Executive Member for Education)

OFFICERS: R Brown, C Cannon, G Moore and K Smith

21/1 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/2 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 19 APRIL 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel held on 19 April 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

21/3 **EDUCATION AND LEARNING - AN OVERVIEW**

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships; the Head of Achievement, Education, Prevention and Partnerships and the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services were in attendance to provide the scrutiny panel with an overview of the main service areas within its remit and an outline of priorities, key issues and challenges for the year ahead.

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that in respect of Covid-19, the numbers had previously declined quite significantly, however, over the past three weeks the number of cases had increased once again. It was commented that the Local Authority had been working with Sir Kevan Collins (the Government's Education Recovery Commissioner) and Sir Alan Wood to discuss education recovery and the role of councils in supporting that work.

It was anticipated that if self-isolation requirements were to remain unchanged, the impact of Covid-19 would cause disruption into the new academic year, as children and young people had not been vaccinated. It was anticipated that keeping groups separate (in 'bubbles') and delivery of remote learning would continue throughout the new academic year.

Members were advised that in a recent announcement by the Department for Education (DfE), proposals for a "landmark investment" of £15bn in teachers, tutoring and an extended school day to help children catch up had been watered down to £1.4bn for schools in England. Nationally, there was not currently a clear picture of what recovery looked like for education. However, it was envisaged that recovery would be focused at a school-level and would be bespoke to each local area.

With Covid-19, the home learning environment was vital in supporting education and that was typically defined by child's or young person's social circumstances.

Members heard that there was a need to identify a baseline of performance and determine how schools would deliver a comprehensive programme of catch-up, which would be aimed at young people who had lost out on learning due to the pandemic.

In terms of elective home education, there had been an increase in the number of children and young people being educated at home and there was a need to determine the drivers

behind that. It was also added that there had been an increase in the number of children and young people missing education. It was advised that children and young people from eastern European countries had been migrating in and out of the area and there was a need to understand the reasons for that. There was also a need for the Local Authority to track those families and ensure those children were safe.

The Director commended the work that schools had undertaken in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools had coped exceptionally well in ensuring their pupils remained safe and continued to learn.

Members heard that an Achievement Strategy had been developed, which would be sent to schools at the end of term. The strategy focused on key areas of recovery and business as usual and included performance measures. It was planned that schools would be consulted on the strategy in September.

In terms of business as usual, the Local Authority had completed a S175, which was a comprehensive safeguarding audit. Reference was made to a national issue that was currently being addressed of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. It was commented that the audit had been undertaken in respect of schools safeguarding procedures and the prevalence of peer on peer abuse, including the sharing of explicit images. Sexual abuse in schools and colleges was less prevalent in Middlesbrough, however, work was being undertaken to determine the reasons for that and a report on the issue was due to be considered by the Safeguarding Partnership (across South Tees).

Work was being undertaken to ensure that Outwood Academy Riverside was built on time and fit for purpose. The new school would provide 200 places for secondary-aged children. It was also advised that there had been £2.3m capital investment at Kings Academy to create 128 additional places.

Members heard that Children's Services continue to prepare for Ofsted inspections (Children's Services inspection, Local area SEND inspection and Adult Learning). A recent Ofsted monitoring visit had taken place, the findings of which were not currently in the public domain.

A Member raised a query regarding the impact of the Covid-19 on schools and the likelihood of vaccines being offered to 12-17 year olds. The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that although vaccinating children could reduce infections across society and keep schools open, as children's risk of severe disease from Covid-19 was very low, it was unlikely that children aged 12-17 would be offered vaccine in UK. Members were advised that any updates on vaccinating children would be reported to the scrutiny panel.

A Member raised a query regarding non-attendance in schools. It was advised that attendance rates had improved, however, unless attendance was at 100% then that still was not good enough. Members were advised that effective tracking and enquiry systems were in place to monitor non-attendance, particularly in respect of vulnerable children (those children with SEND and those open to social care, i.e. Children in Need, Children in Need of Protection and Children in Care). There were valid reasons for the non-attendance of some children and young people, particularly those with SEND, and work was undertaken to offer them a bespoke package of support. It was commented that an Education Welfare Officer had been employed to track, monitor and visit those children who were absent from school.

A Member queried the sufficiency of school places for September 2021. It was advised that actions had been undertaken by the Council to create an additional 128 places at Kings Academy to ensure a sufficient number of school places were available. The Local Authority had been notified of a potential delay in the scheduled completion of Outwood Academy Riverside. The Local Authority was working with the DfE to mitigate any delay to the project timeline and put plans in place in case extra places were required.

A Member expressed concern with regards to those children missing education, particularly those children of migrant families (particularly eastern European). The Director explained that a child's absence was flagged on the first day they were absent. If the Local Authority was initially unable to locate a child, benefit checks would be undertaken, social worker and police intelligence would be accessed and the border agency would be contacted. In respect of those children who could not be located, each child's case would become a cold case, which would be revisited throughout the academic year and termly checks would be conducted.

In response to a Member's query regarding the impact of the role of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO), the Director advised that the EWO and Welfare Call had played a significant role in driving up attendance and an increase in attendance had been reported. The EWO engaged directly with children, families and schools to build relationships, unpick problems and break down the barriers that prevent attendance. There were effective tracking and enquiry systems in place to monitor non-attendance, including Welfare Call, which provided real time and robust attendance data/information. Schools also had direct contact with social workers. The Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that, for those children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, a lead professional was in place and a robust system had been developed in partnership with schools, health and social care.

Given the recent Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges, a Member made reference to the Digital Resilience Group, led by Ralph Jordinson. The Head of Education, Achievement, Prevention and Partnerships advised that schools were engaging with the group, a safeguarding lead network met on a monthly basis and a working party had been established to develop a town-wide response focusing on peer-on-peer abuse.

In response to a Member's query regarding access to free school meals during periods of self-isolation, the Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that schools had collection points for food parcels/packed lunches and procedures were in place ensure that food was available and was of an appropriate standard.

In response to a Member's query regarding bridging the gap between public and private schools, the Head of Achievement, Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that the Achievement Strategy would aim to address attainment gaps and support children and young people to catch up on missed learning caused by coronavirus (COVID19). It was advised that there was a need to work with school leaders to ensure delivery of the learning that had not taken place and ensure the delivery of new learning. The Achievement Strategy included local expertise and best practice.

Members heard that four secondary schools had provided additional learning for Year 6 pupils, including, mathematics, science and English. That work had provided pupils with an understanding of the secondary curriculum before they transition from primary school. Work was also being undertaken to ensure secondary schools understood the primary curriculum.

In addition:

- The Local Authority met with school leaders on a fortnightly basis.
- The Learning Middlesbrough website had been recently launched. The website provided education resources, advice, and self-help information to support families and professionals. School feedback on the resource had been extremely positive.
- The current Covid-19 regulations and requirements to self-isolate had impacted on the availability of teaching staff, therefore the Local Authority was working alongside schools to create a teaching pool. It was envisaged that the teaching pool would reduce the costs of supply, provide consistency and offer 3 monthly contracts to improve retention rates.
- The Local Authority had developed positive working relationships with schools.
- Through collaboration, a mathematics hub and an English hub had been developed, working across the two key stages, sharing best practice and promoting learning.
- 100% of early years practitioners had participated in the early years reform training.
- The School Readiness Team had employed creative and innovate strategies to achieve 92% contact with families.
- In terms of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the annual data return demonstrated that 99% of plans had been completed and Middlesbrough had been ranked 9th nationally and 2nd in the north east.
- The Local Authority had been working with the DfE to improve the take-up of private tutoring.

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that work was planned to ensure that all Alternative Provision (AP) placements were within registered settings. It was also added that there were currently 2 pupils who had access to less than 25 hours education and there was a need to address that issue.

NOTED

SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME - 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the purpose of the report was to invite the scrutiny panel to consider its work programme for the current municipal year.

It was commented that the report contained a list of topical issues, which were anticipated to be of particular interest to the scrutiny panel, those included:

- the impact of COVID-19 on education and the Council's Recovery Plan;
- post-16 education;
- children missing education;
- sexual abuse in schools and colleges; and
- an update on sufficiency of school places.

Also included within the submitted report were suggestions that had been received from Children's Services, those included:

- recovery;
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); and
- Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) improvement

Reference was made to the aid attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, which would enable Members to prioritise issues where scrutiny could make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development.

It was recommended that two topics be selected for the work programme for 2021/22.

A discussion ensued:

- Members commented on the importance of the scrutiny panel investigating the impact of COVID-19 on education and the Council's Recovery Plan.
- A Member suggested the following topics:
 - The changes to the national curriculum, the new curriculum - relationships and sex education (RSE) and the impact on schools.
 - In terms of those with SEND, what support was provided to high achievers.
- A Member recommended that in respect of SEND, there was a need to ensure that children and young people were receiving appropriate provision for their needs.
- A Member commented that it would be advantageous to investigate the reasons for those pupils with SEND missing education.
- A Member commented that Post-16 education was of interest and there was a need to ensure that young people receive the skills and training to find great jobs.
- A Member suggested that sexual abuse in schools and colleges should be investigated to identify the prevalence of the issue in Middlesbrough.
- A Member recommended that the bullying of pupils with SEND should be investigated.

Following discussion, Members were in agreement that SEND, the impact of COVID-19 on education and the Council's Recovery Plan and Post-16 education should be included in the work programme for 2021/22. It was agreed that the comments made by Members throughout the discussion, in respect of SEND, would be taken forward when determining the terms of reference for the SEND review.

AGREED

That the topics listed below be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval and inclusion in the work programme of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel for 2021/2022:

In-depth reviews

- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**
- **The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and the Council's Recovery Plan**

Short review/one-off meeting

- **Post-16 Education**

21/5

EDUCATION AND COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships commented that in respect of Covid-19, the numbers had previously declined quite significantly, however, over the past three weeks the number of cases had increased once again. As previously stipulated, it was anticipated that if self-isolation requirements were to remain unchanged, the impact of Covid-19 would cause disruption into the new academic year, as children and young people had not been vaccinated. It was anticipated that keeping groups separate (in 'bubbles') and delivery of remote learning would continue throughout the new academic year.

It was commented that due to Covid-19, sports days had not been family events and physical transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7 had stopped.

Members were advised that at a future meeting, the impact that Covid-19 on particular age groups would be reported.

Currently 23 (out of 54) schools currently had pupils self-isolating - 18 bubbles had been affected.

NOTED

21/6

PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2021/22

A proposed meeting schedule, for the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, was submitted for the scrutiny panel's consideration.

AGREED

That the proposed meeting schedule, for 2021/22, be approved.