

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Deputy Mayor & Lead Member for Children's Services

DATE OF MEETING: 29 March 2023

This report aims to provide an update to members on activity within my portfolio and performance against the strategic priorities I either lead on or am involved with.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Consolidate and build on recent children's services progress to improve Ofsted rating.

WHAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN:

At the time of publication, Ofsted are with us for their full inspection – the ILACS.

The outcome of this will be hugely significant for our authority as it follows the last full inspection, which took place in 2019, which deemed our children's services department inadequate in every area.

Although there is clearly further work to go to improve, we do believe that we've come a very long way and I want to put on record my thanks to all members of staff, councillors and our partners who have played their part in this work.

As well as staff I have been interviewed by the lead inspector and we hope to get informal feedback soon. As soon as the full result can be shared we will make certain to let members know.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Consolidate and build on recent children's services progress to improve Ofsted rating.

WHAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN:

It was an honour to be asked to speak and present awards at our event at the Town Hall to celebrate our amazing foster carers.

There were some inspirational stories that spoke of the loving homes our foster carers provide and how the children they care for are thriving.

We gave a Lifetime Achievement Award to a couple who have been foster carers for Middlesbrough Council for 29 years.

They have had a large number of children in their care, they have moved children onto adoption, back to parents/family and onto long term fostering.

They remain in contact with some children they have cared for and adopted two sisters who are now in their 20s.

We also gave a Foster Carer of the Year Award to a couple who have shown great resilience and commitment during the last few years. They have overcome personal difficulties while remaining focussed on providing excellent care to children.

They even put their own family Christmas on hold to take an emergency placement for three children just prior to Christmas.

I want to put on record our heartfelt thanks to all of them.

As well as improving the support available to our foster carers, we have responded to their calls for improved pay which has been necessary due to the cost of living crisis.

We believe the improved offer will also stop our much-appreciated foster carers leaving to join an independent fostering agency, which can cost us as a local authority double.

At present there are insufficient numbers of foster placements available either internally or externally to meet our needs and overall. Our ambition is to grow our in-house fostering service in line with our sufficiency ambition to have more children and young people placed in foster care and with a Middlesbrough Council foster carer.

The initial response to these changes have been positive and I look forward to updating you on how it's impacted the service.

DIRECTORATE PRIORITY: Deliver the Learning and Education Strategy to help school improvement and support educational outcomes in Middlesbrough.

WHAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN:

Tuneful youngsters at a Middlesbrough secondary school have told us about their experiences learning a classical instrument thanks to a programme we support.

Year 7 pupils at Outwood Riverside have been busy practicing the trumpet or clarinet on the Andrew Lloyd-Webber backed Music in Secondary Schools Trust (MiSST) programme.

MiSST was launched last year at the town centre school, allowing 200 children at Outwood to join more than 440 pupils at the King's Academy in Coulby Newham who were already part of the project.

I recently caught up with some of the children taking part at Outwood Riverside.

Ismail, 11, is learning to play the clarinet at Outwood.

He said "I think it's been really fun. It was hard at first, but I like to practice. "I think without MiSST I wouldn't have even known that the clarinet existed."

Lola, also aged 11, agreed: "I play the clarinet and I already liked playing the piano. "It is really fun and it isn't that hard. Piano was already good because I practiced at home, but now I love the clarinet as well."

It's been fantastic to see so many young people learning a new instrument and wonderful to hear from them about their passion for music.

Without the MiSST programme, then nine out of ten young people in Middlesbrough would not be able to access music lessons like this and I'm determined to roll it out further. I'd love to see all Middlesbrough children get the chance to learn a musical instrument.

Middlesbrough Council made funding available to bring the project to schools in the town with support from MiSST, the schools themselves and Tees Valley Music.

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WHAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN:

One of my favourite parts of my role as deputy mayor is visiting our schools – and I have had the opportunity to visit many recently.

It's great to have the opportunity to speak directly to young people and listen to their hopes and ambitions for our town.

Children at The Avenue Primary School in Nunthorpe and Green Lane Primary Academy in Acklam had brilliant questions to ask and showed excellent understanding.

A big thank you to the headteachers who very kindly took time out of their days to take me around the school and introduce me to teachers and children.