

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on 7 December 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors A Hellaoui (Chair), T Higgins, D Jones, M Saunders and G Wilson

OFFICERS: C Breheny, R Brown, S Butcher, C Cannon, J Dixon, T Dunn and G Moore

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillors L Garvey, S Hill, M Nugent and P Storey.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 9 NOVEMBER 2020

The minutes of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting, held on 9 November 2020, were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2 BEHAVIOUR, DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - FURTHER EVIDENCE

Officers were in attendance, at the meeting, to provide the scrutiny panel with:

- detailed information on the new Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service and the 'Team Around the School' approach;
- examples of the cases dealt with by the service and the outcomes achieved; and
- information on the feedback received from schools on the new model and preliminary data on its impact.

The Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services provided details in respect of newly developed Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service and the 'Team Around the School' approach. The model had been developed in July 2020 and was implemented in schools in September 2020. The purpose of the model was to support behaviour management and greater inclusion in schools.

Members were advised that the new model had been established to tackle the high number of exclusions, the pressures on local placements in terms of Alternative Provision (AP), the increasing numbers of children and young people with Education Health Care Plans (EHCP), the increasing number of requests for Education Health Care Assessments (EHCA) and significant pressures on the Council's High Needs Budget. It was clarified that the High Needs Budget was funding that the Local Authority received to support those children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Children's Services had used feedback from schools, young people and families to help inform the development of the model. Data was also analysed to develop the model, including the number of exclusions in each school, the number of children and young people with an EHCP in each school, the number of requests for EHCA from each school and the number of requests for Matrix Funding from each school. By undertaking that work it had been ascertained that although there had been a high number of exclusions in some schools, those schools had not requested Matrix Funding. In addition, some schools had made a high number of requests for EHCA, however, following the assessment it had been determined that an EHCP was not required. It was therefore identified that schools would benefit from receiving training on the support available for children and young people with SEND and the statutory process.

The scrutiny panel was advised that previously there had been an Alternative Provision Service and a SEND Assessment Service. The Alternative Provision Service had supported children and young people who had been at risk of exclusion, or had been excluded, by finding suitable alternative placements. The SEND Assessment Service had been responsible

for undertaking all the statutory assessments. Those two services had now been replaced by one service - the Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service. The management of the service was the responsibility of the newly appointed Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service and three additional Inclusion Officers had also been appointed to provide support and assistance to schools. In addition, the capacity of the Educational Psychology Team had been increased, to provide enhanced support to the secondary school sector.

Members were advised that the 'Team Around the School' approach involved early identification, curriculum alternatives and a Pupil Inclusion Panel. It was clarified that the previous model had a Pupil Inclusion Panel for the secondary sector, however, the new model had a Pupil Inclusion Panel for both primary and secondary sectors. The Pupil Inclusion Panels examined referrals from schools to identify strategies, support and alternative placements that would assist in meeting the needs of pupils at risk of exclusion.

In terms of the secondary sector, there was a start of year joint planning meeting. The aim of the meeting was to develop a shared understanding of the school context, identify school priorities (whole school, smaller group and individual pupil level) and devise a plan to address needs/concerns. The main objectives of the meeting were to understand, identify and plan.

A number of key representatives were involved in the start of year joint planning meeting, including key school staff (such as member/s of the Senior Leadership Team, SENDCo, Pastoral Lead, Behaviour Support and any other support staff), the Educational Psychologist (EP), the Inclusion Officer and the Head of the Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service. It was commented that an Educational Psychologist and Inclusion Officer had been assigned to each school to ensure continuous support. It was advised that staff who delivered learning and language support, wellbeing services (such as Headstart, CAMHS etc.) and other support services, relevant to the needs of the school, may also provide input at the meeting.

Each meeting was facilitated (and recorded) by the EP using information from school staff and information shared within the meeting. Members of the 'Team Around the School' would devise an action plan, which could include actions for the whole school, small groups/cohorts and individual pupils. It was added that follow-up meetings were held following the initial planning meeting to ensure that actions were monitored and remained on track. Solutions to address any barriers or delays encountered, in respect of implementation, would also be discussed.

In terms of strategic outcomes, the new model was promoting collaborative and partnership working across Middlesbrough, ensuring the effective delivery of services, delivering a co-ordinated approach to support, developing inclusive practices, promoting the social and educational inclusion of children and young people, assisting with ensuring that children and young people were on the appropriate pathways, providing better planning for Alternative Provision places and reducing exclusions.

Since the implementation of the new model, positive feedback had been received from schools. To enable the development of the 'Team Around the School' approach, regular meetings had been held to review and improve the model and remove any barriers encountered with its implementation in schools.

In an attempt to assess the impact of the new model, data from the current academic year was compared to the previous academic year. In terms of permanent exclusion figures:

- in November 2019, 15 pupils had been excluded; and
- in November 2020, 9 pupils were excluded.

In terms of fixed-term exclusion figures:

- in November 2019, there had been 1023 days of fixed-term exclusions; and
- in November 2020, there had been 583 days.

In terms requests for EHCPs, from September 2019 to November 2019, there had been 49 and for the same period during the current academic year, 38 requests had been received.

Preliminary data demonstrated the positive impact of the new model on exclusion rates and requests for EHCPs, however, Members were asked to be mindful of the possible impact of COVID-19 on the figures. It was also highlighted that, in response to the pandemic, a range of enhanced support was currently being offered to schools.

It was planned that the staffing structure of the model would be reviewed in January 2021 and a full review of the service would take place in July 2021. The full review would involve gaining feedback from children, young people, families and schools to ensure a full and comprehensive evaluation of the model.

In a response to a Member's query regarding engagement with academies, the Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that positive working relationships had been established with academies. It was added that, although the Coronavirus pandemic had created many challenges for education, through meeting regularly with schools, stronger working relationships had been established between the Local Authority and academies.

In response to a Member's query regarding inclusion in primary schools, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that in respect of the new model, 144 requests for support had been received and 66 of those requests had been received from primary schools and related to behaviour and the needs of pupils. The scrutiny panel was advised that the development of the Pupil Inclusion Panel for the primary sector planned to assist in gaining an insight into the challenges encountered by primary schools. It was also added that Holmwood School delivered outreach support to the primary sector.

In response to a Member's query regarding funding, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that it had been identified that some schools had not requested Matrix Funding. Therefore, work had been undertaken, and training had been delivered, to ensure that schools were aware of how to access the range of funding and support available in Middlesbrough.

In response to a Member's query regarding the staffing structure of the team, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that the staffing structure included the Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service, a Lead for Curriculum Development and Alternative Provision Placements, a Lead for Inclusion, Assessment and Review, the Inclusion Team, the Assessment Team and the Annual Review Team. It was explained that in terms of the three additional Inclusion Officer posts that had been created, funding had been accessed from the High Needs Budget. It was envisaged that investing additional funding and resources in providing early support would reduce the demand for Alternative Provision placements.

Following queries from Members regarding the EHCPs, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that in terms of thresholds for EHCPs there was statutory/legal requirements. As part of the legal framework, there was a range of support and guidance that was offered. It was explained that, in Middlesbrough, the High Needs Budget was not allocated to specifically provide support to those pupils with EHCPs, funding was also allocated to support those pupils without a plan.

In response to a Member's query regarding Educational Psychologists, the Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services advised that although there was a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EP), Middlesbrough had a strong team of EPs. It was added that, as part of the new model, the Local Authority had invested funding to increase capacity of the team, enabling the team to offer further enhanced support to the secondary school sector.

The scrutiny panel commended the work that had been undertaken in respect of developing and implementing the new model. It was agreed that further updates, in respect of impact of the new model, would be reported to the scrutiny panel in due course.

AGREED

That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.

3 BEHAVIOUR, DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Democratic Services Officer advised that following the last meeting of the scrutiny panel, held on 9 November, the draft terms of reference had been circulated to Members for comment.

Members were invited to consider, discuss and agree the finalised terms of reference that had been proposed for the review, which had been circulated with the agenda pack.

The Executive Director of Children's Services commented on the importance of highlighting the views and opinions of children and young people throughout the review.

A discussion ensued and Members were in agreement that a specific statement should be included alongside the terms of reference, which highlights the scrutiny panel's intention to obtain the views and opinions of children and young people throughout the review.

In response to a Member's query regarding ways of accessing the views of children and young people, the Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that particularly in respect of supporting those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the Local Authority had established effective ways of capturing the voice of the child or young person, including accessing user groups. The Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services added that the Local Authority had a Lead Participation Officer whose role involved capturing the views of children and young people via one-to-one meetings, small group meetings and conferences etc. The scrutiny panel was advised that feedback from children and young people would also be accessed when conducting a full review of the new model in July 2021. It was commented that the information obtained as part of the review would be reported back to the scrutiny panel.

The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision advised that approximately a year ago, a review of the Alternative Provision Service had been undertaken. As part of that review, work had been undertaken to obtain the views and opinions of children and young people, questions were planned and group discussions were arranged. It was commented that the feedback obtained from those discussions had been really useful and helpful. The importance of asking supplementary questions, following the initial responses of children and young people, was conveyed. It was added that once the conversations began to flow, the feedback received provided valuable insights.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that in 2018 the scrutiny panel had undertaken a review entitled 'Listening to the Voice of the Child', therefore, a copy of the report would be circulated to panel members.

Members commented that seeking the views of school councils could provide an opportunity to gain the views of the whole student population. The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships advised that school councils could be approached with a series of questions. The Executive Director of Children's Services commented that the Member of Youth Parliament could provide assistance with the scrutiny panel's investigation by engaging with pupils and seeking feedback.

AGREED:

1. **That, throughout the investigation of the topic, the scrutiny panel endeavour to seek the views and opinions of children and young people.**
2. **That the terms of reference be agreed as follows:**
 - **To identify the powers and duties of schools to manage behaviour and discipline pupils.**

- To investigate the Local Authority's role in supporting schools with behaviour management and the impact of its work.
- To examine the causes of pupil behaviour problems e.g. unmet educational or other needs.
- To identify the challenges faced by schools in dealing with poor behaviour and bullying and to examine the reasons some schools have higher rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusions.
- To investigate the types of sanctions used by schools that can impact on a pupil's educational outcomes and life chances.
- To examine the successful and proactive strategies and solutions used by schools to promote positive behaviour, manage poor behaviour and prevent and tackle bullying.

4 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - AN UPDATE

The Chair advised that on 20 November 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Board considered:

- The Call In on Future Accommodation.

On 3 December, the Board considered:

- the Executive Forward Work Programme;
- Middlesbrough Council's Response to COVID-19;
- an Executive Member Update from the Executive Member for Environment (including information on the pot hole initiative, fly tipping, junk jobs and the Green Strategy) ;
and
- updates from the scrutiny chairs.

NOTED