
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 26 July 2021.

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

OFFICERS: S Butcher, G Moore and K Smith

21/7 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

21/8 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 28 JUNE 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, held on 28 June 2021, were submitted and approved as a correct record.

21/9 **ADDRESSING POVERTY ISSUES AND THE IMPACT ON LEARNING - AN UPDATE**

In respect of the scrutiny panel's 2020 review of Addressing Poverty Issues and the Impact on Learning, the Head of Achievement, Education, Prevention and Partnerships was in attendance to provide an update on the progress made with the implementation of the agreed recommendations/actions.

It was advised that, as a result of the scrutiny panel's investigation, there had been a review of current practices and new initiatives had been developed.

The following points were made:

- The mapping exercise concluded that partnerships were already established. It had been found that collaborative practice was already in place, which was led by Middlesbrough Council's Financial Inclusion Group (FIG). In addition to the FIG, the Employment Network Group (ENG) and Northern Skills Group led by Middlesbrough College brought together the expertise and experience to focus on routes to employment.
- The Local Authority's Community Learning Team was working hard to establish links to employment, such as 50 Futures. It had been recognised that families had been accessing support from the Community Learning Team, throughout the pandemic, to develop I.T. literacy.
- Carmel Research School (a network of schools that supported the use of evidence to improve teaching practice) was developing a program to support disadvantaged pupils. The program was tasked to break the link between family income and educational outcomes, improving success and life chances for disadvantaged pupils in particular. Work was scheduled to be started in September 2021 and numerous Middlesbrough schools had been selected to engage with the program.
- The mapping process had provided reassurance that multi-agency working was already in place and relevant stakeholders were working together to collectively mitigate the impact of poverty on learning.
- To mitigate the impact of poverty on pupils, each school had been encouraged to produce a bespoke poverty proofing policy.
- Monitoring tools were used to measure poverty rates and trends. Education monitored Pupil Premium outcomes and the percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) from Early Years to Key Stage 4. Pupil Premium data was regularly monitored and analysed to assess the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

- The Local Authority's Learning & Education Strategy prioritised achievement gaps for disadvantaged pupils looking at their progress and attainment over time, from pre-school through to work readiness.
- The welfare reform report (produced by the FIG) monitored access to financial advice, including housing support.
- The Revenue and Benefits Team had implemented systems, which ensured that those families who were entitled to benefits received them and that the correct amount of benefit was received.
- Education tracked every pupil cohort, including the most vulnerable children, and data was readily available. The data enabled the Local Authority to identify and prioritise schools and deliver targeted support.
- The Local Authority had recently brought the Unclaimed Benefits Campaign and Hub Advice Service under one project. That collaboration had been developed by the FIG and was led by the Welfare Rights Unit. Partner organisations were Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Age UK, Cleveland Housing and Advice Centre (CHAC) and Achieving Change Through Enterprising Solutions (ACTES).
- Parent support advisors worked diligently in school to ensure the appropriate information was received by parents.
- The FIG addressed issues in respect of parental concern, whereas from an education perspective, the Local Authority challenged and supported schools to promote pupil outcomes and ensure inclusion.

In response to Members' queries, it was advised that, in terms of the FIG membership, previously there had been no education representation. The Head of Achievement, Education, Prevention and Partnerships now attended meetings, provided input and engaged with the group. It was also added that, regardless of a pupil's eligibility in respect of Free School Meals (FSM), schools continued to support each pupil and offer parents subsidised food and clothing.

In response to a Member's query regarding the use of data to challenge schools, it was advised that school review monitoring visits took place. There was a categorisation process that enabled the Local Authority to identify the support and challenge that was necessary. Prioritisation was fundamentally dependent on whether a school was developing, emerging or secure. It was also added that:

- reading, phonics and mathematics were key areas that had been identified when analysing data;
- mathematics and English hubs had been re-established to support schools; and
- reviews of schools professional development were undertaken by the School Readiness Manager and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT) Manager.

It was also commented that the Head of Achievement, Education, Prevention and Partnerships held discussions with governing bodies to determine the impact of training and other professional development opportunities.

In response to a Member's query regarding assessing the impact of school poverty proofing policies and practices, it was advised that pupil outcome data was tracked, monitored and analysed. It was also conveyed that there was a constant oversight of vulnerable families.

A Member raised a query regarding holiday provision for pupils eligible for FSM. It was advised that 10 secondary schools were providing summer holiday provision, which was being funded by the DfE. Although pupils could not be required to attend, the Local Authority was able to promote the offer to increase participation. In addition to that, there was the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF), managed by Public Health, which provided the opportunity for all disadvantaged and SEND pupils to access free activities during the summer holidays. In terms of primary schools, two schools (Park End Primary School and Captain Cook Primary School) had delivered holiday activities over the Easter break. It was clarified that, although primary schools were not providing summer holiday provision, the HAF was delivering activities over the summer break.

A Member raised a query regarding the Carmel Research School in Darlington. It was advised that 12 Middlesbrough schools, covering both primary and secondary sectors,

had been invited to engage with the program. Carmel Research School had assessed school-level data to determine which schools would benefit most from engaging with the program.

In response to a Member's query regarding remote learning and support for English as an additional language (EAL) learners and their families, it was advised that guidance had been translated and circulated by the EMAT.

A Member commented that it would be beneficial for the scrutiny panel to be notified of how many schools had signed up to the school uniform pledge.

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that the Local Authority was taking a corporate approach to tackling poverty and the work would be taken forward by the wider leadership team.

AGREED

That the progress made with the implementation of the agreed recommendations/actions be noted.

21/10

DRAFT FINAL REPORT - BEHAVIOUR, DISCIPLINE AND BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

A discussion ensued and Members commented on various aspects of the report including the responsibilities and knowledge of governing bodies, the importance of schools dealing with incidences of bullying in accordance with DfE and Ofsted guidance and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on exclusions.

In respect of paragraph 9, bullet point 5, a Member requested that the responsibility of the governing body to publicise the school behaviour policy also be referenced.

Draft recommendations had been tabled at the meeting for the scrutiny panel's consideration.

A Member expressed concern in respect of Middlesbrough's exclusion rates and highlighted the need for the scrutiny panel to monitor and examine rates on a six monthly basis. Recommendation b) was amended accordingly to accommodate that proposal.

A Member commented that it would be beneficial for the scrutiny panel to have sight of the outcomes associated with recommendations d) and e). The Democratic Services Officer advised that an update on the implementation of proposed recommendations/actions would be submitted to a future meeting of the scrutiny panel and the outcomes of those particular recommendations would form part of that update.

Following discussion, the following recommendations were agreed for inclusion in the final report:

- a) In respect of the new Inclusion, Assessment and Review Service and the 'Team Around the School' approach, that:
 - i. a full and comprehensive evaluation is undertaken, which takes into account the impact of COVID-19 and the risk management controls currently in place within schools; and
 - ii. the key findings, outcomes and outputs of the evaluation are reported to the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, including feedback received from children and young people.
- b) That the Local Authority holds schools to account more transparently for their exclusion rates by:
 - i. monitoring, analysing and recording exclusion data at a school-level;
 - ii. undertaking regular focussed visits to those schools with high rates to assist with putting measures in place to reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusions; and
 - iii. reporting exclusion data to the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel on a 6 monthly basis.

- c) That, where exclusion rates are high, the Local Authority:
 - i. provides an enhanced bespoke package of support to assist schools in identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEND and additional vulnerabilities; and
 - ii. delivers training to demonstrate the detrimental impact of exclusion on a pupil's life and life chances.
- d) That the Local Authority shares good practice with schools by facilitating peer reviews and providing case study illustrations of good behaviour management practices.
- e) That a guidance document is developed and circulated to schools on the importance of language and its influence on changing perceptions and attitudes.
- f) That schools are encouraged to undertake an anonymous survey of staff and students about their views on behaviour, discipline and bullying and that feedback is utilised to improve behaviour management practices.

AGREED

That, subject to the inclusion of the agreed recommendations, the final report on Behaviour, Discipline and Bullying in Schools be approved and submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration.

21/11

EDUCATION AND COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Executive Director for Children's Services provided the scrutiny panel with an update on education and COVID-19 recovery. Members were advised that:

- The Local Authority's relationships with schools had improved considerably throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and it was crucial that those positive working relationships continued.
- In terms of children not attending school, due to COVID-19:
 - in September 2020, 163 were absent;
 - in October 2020, 498 were absent;
 - in November 2020, 617 were absent;
 - from December 2020 to May 2021, figures reduced to 46; and
 - throughout June and July, figures rose once again to 677.
- During the academic year, 63% of the pupil population had one or more episodes of virtual learning.
- In terms of children looked after, daily attendance was monitored and reviews and risk assessments were undertaken.
- A service had been commissioned, the Vulnerable Children's Attendance Program, which enabled the Local Authority to collect and analyse data and information on vulnerable children that were not attending school, including those who were subject to child protection plans and children in need plans.

In response to a Member's query regarding updates on vaccinations for pupils, it was advised that the Local Authority met regularly with headteachers and daily updates were circulated on guidance and bulletins published by the Department of Education (DfE).

NOTED

21/12

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - AN UPDATE

The Chair advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, which had been held on 29 June 2021, the Board had considered:

- the Executive Forward Work Programme;
- an update from the Chief Executive in respect of the Council's response to COVID-19 and other organisational matters;
- an update on Town Centre Regeneration, the Future High Streets Fund, as well as an overview of the plans for the transformation of the Town Centre;
- the Strategic Plan 2020-23 - Progress at Year-End 2020/21;
- the Revenue and Capital Budget - Year-End Outturn Position 2020/21;

- the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel's Final Report on Members Communications; and
- the Scrutiny Chairs Updates.

NOTED

21/13

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

The Chair advised that the work programme was scheduled to be considered and approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday 28 July 2021.

Members were reminded that that the scrutiny panel had selected the following topics for investigation during the 2021/22 municipal year.

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

NOTED