

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
22 FEBRUARY 2012

7.15 – 10.15pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, Karin Forbes, Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Dennis Pearce, Linda Scott, Simon Withey  
Colin Powell, Alison Jerrard, Andrew Boxall, Amanda Stuart Fisher

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin, Peter Walker  
Yvette Stanley, (Director Children Schools and Families), Jan Martin, (Head of Education), Paul Ballatt, (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Kate Saksena, (School Standards and Quality Manager), Michael Sutherland, (Service Manager, Policy, Planning and Performance), Hilary Gullen, (Scrutiny Officer).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED: That the minutes are agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

**Paul Ballatt agreed to circulate the Safe Parenting Handbook (page 7)**

**Yvette Stanley undertook to inform the MCSB of the discussion (page 8) at the next formal meeting**

Clarification was given as to which co-opted members had statutory voting rights on educational matters as listed on the inside cover of the agenda.

Jan Martin, Head of Education, reported back on schools sharing expertise, as on page 9, explaining that informal arrangements were in place, such as shadowing. No formal arrangements had been put in place yet - this was still under consideration.

5 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

Paul Ballatt, Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Improvement introduced this report and explained that the major Ofsted inspection had taken place, but the formal report would not be published by Ofsted until 24<sup>th</sup> February. The report covered an update on primary school places for September 2012. A strategy for secondary school places was also being considered. Panel were informed about the successful bid by the Merton Partnership to secure PRG funds for the Phipps Bridge project and the Government's new 'Troubled Families' initiative. A Troubled Families project

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manager had been appointed and Paul Ballatt would report back to Panel on progress in due course.

Panel discussed whether the strategy would minimise journeys to school for students, the temporary use of Chapel Orchard as agreed by Cabinet earlier in the week, and whether any funding had been identified for future schools.

Paul Ballatt explained that the current capital programme ran to 2016 and the additional demand for secondary places was not expected until that time. However, it is very likely new secondary school accommodation will be required and the department were actively working with Environment and Regeneration colleagues to identify potential sites. The first stage in finding places for secondary students would be to fill existing surplus places and all secondary schools would be approached shortly to consider expansion. An additional site, if needed, would best be located centrally within the borough. This would require capital budget, which is not in the current capital programme. The increase in secondary pupil places required was expected to increase in stages to 2021. Filling surplus places would meet demand to 2015, and at that point, more accommodation would be required.

In response to a question about the time taken to acquire land for future school building, Paul Ballatt agreed that it was a very long process to buy land from private owners, but council land would be considered first. There is a cross party group looking at pupil places, and they would look at the detail and reports would come to panel as appropriate. It was acknowledged the secondary school placement programme would be one of the biggest projects the council had faced.

In response to a question about unannounced inspections, Jan Martin, Head of Education, explained the new regime of unannounced inspections would not be starting until September. Some routine inspections had taken place, but the results were not ready yet.

**RESOLVED: that officers use email, as appropriate, to update panel members on continuing progress, and that a formal report be brought to panel, the timing of which to be discussed as part of the work programme for the next municipal year.**

6 CELEBRATING SUCCESS – STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN  
MERTON SCHOOLS 2010/2011

Kate Saksena, School Standards and Quality Manager, introduced this report.

Questions on section A (pages 22 – 24)

Panel were informed of the rapidly changing population of Merton in terms of increasing numbers of children and increased population diversity. It was also noted that there was at secondary age, as in many boroughs, a change in population with an in and out flow which resulted in increased levels of deprivation amongst the pupil population.

On Section B (pages 25-54) a panel member asked for more information on the

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larger proportion of girls in the borough in the lowest achieving 20% than the national average.

Kate Saksena explained that some schools cater better for a particular group eg for boys. This had to be looked at on a school by school basis, and in Early Years this might involve as small a group as 6 pupils.

A panel member expressed concern at the attainment of Black African pupils, which was below the national average at this stage.

Kate Saksena explained that by GCSE there was a marked improvement in attainment for this group. However, this was a complex group as Africa includes 30 countries and over 50 languages. There were different language issues and cultural issues which would need to be born in mind within the group which encompasses all African heritage pupils. The new Ofsted regime would focus on individual pupil groups and schools would be helped to look more carefully at what could be done to help any particular group seen to need additional help. In some schools this was already underway with parents being involved, for example, work with Somali groups, which is one of our more rapidly growing communities.

A panel member also expressed concern over the Black Caribbean and White British groups where there didn't seem to be an improvement by GCSEs.

Kate Saksena confirmed that while attainment for these groups was better than in previous years and considerable attention had been given to these groups, more needed to be done in partnership with schools, parents and the voluntary sector. Schools were looking to work in partnerships to improve performance.

It was explained to panel that the figures for KS4 were not for the same cohort of pupils in other key stages in the report.

Panel queried the figure for exclusion by group for White Roma Gypsy on page 47, as there were 3 Travellers of Irish heritage, but 166% exclusions. This was explained by some individuals being excluded more than once and it being a very small cohort (less than 5 children).

A panel member pointed out that years 11, 12 and 13 students were currently in their final term and there were very recent predicted grades available. Staff were able to plan interventions to maximise the opportunities for the students. This year would show the first set of results for the new sixth form provision, and that partnership working had been very successful.

Panel members were also given additional information on Merton Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC). It was pointed out that comparison against National figures was difficult as each cohort was so small. The virtual school looks after three groups of Looked After Children; Merton LAC in Merton schools; Merton LAC in out of borough schools, and LAC from other boroughs attending Merton schools. The virtual team supports foster parents and school staff to develop an annual plan for the Looked After Child, to see what support was needed at home, at school and what additional help was required, such as personal tuition. It was important to help the LAC catch up, as they had generally missed a lot of school. The virtual school could

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help with preparation for exams and help with building up self confidence and self esteem. LAC were encouraged to join youth clubs and drama groups to do this. LAC were taken to visit universities early on to raise their awareness of opportunities available.

Regarding attendance data, panel members expressed concern about the high levels of non attendance recorded for certain groups. Kate Saksena pointed out that different groups had different issues to consider, for example, pupils from the Indian sub continent were known to take long holidays, and pupils from Eastern Europe were known to take extended weekends. The school will look at the situation for each child and their family. For under eleven year olds it was recognised that it was the parents' role to get the child to school. The council did exercise legal powers to improve attendance, and some parents had been taken to court. Some schools used the Education Welfare Service to set up 'nurture' groups, which could include parent groups as well as the children. Some families were referred through Early Intervention. Yvette Stanley also pointed out that parenting orders were used, and the council was required to perform this function for that the borough academies as well.

Persistent absence was defined as less than 85% attendance, which was cumulative over the school year. Pupils in receipt of free school meals were known nationally to have lower attendance than others. Some of this group come from high deprivation families and have complex needs.

Kate Saksena confirmed that attendance was given priority in nurseries, where staff watch for patterns of attendance and try to sort out problems early.

A panel member expressed concern that the budget cuts will impact on attendance for Special Educational Needs pupils. Kate Saksena pointed out that there had been some improvement in attendance rates for this group, and there had been a big improvement in KS4 results – a trend which was expected to continue.

Yvette Stanley reassured panel members that for those children undergoing independence training there would be very careful monitoring.

### Exclusions (page 61)

A panel member expressed concern over the proportion of Black Caribbean students being excluded, which was higher than the national figure. Kate Saksena agreed the figure was too high for Black exclusions overall and that there would be discussions with individual schools to see what needs to happen to improve this. An action plan would be put in place from the discussions. Yvette Stanley described recent discussions with Merton Unity Network, to consider how partnership work on this issue could be strengthened.

A panel member spoke from personal experience about how he had seen a dramatic change in exclusions, with those taking place now being for far more serious incidents, such as knife carrying, than had been the case in the past. Yvette Stanley spoke of how there is quite often an escalation of incidents and staff needed to get behind the issues to find appropriate interventions to help the student. This was a

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complicated problem and there was more work to do.

Michael Sutherland, Service Manager, Policy, Planning and Performance, described several types of analysis that can be done, which show a correlation between school exclusion and offending. Work was being done with Safer Merton to identify geographical areas where offending occurred to get a picture of the population and the scale of issues. This would enable intervention to be targeted appropriately.

In response to a panel member's query regarding ensuring teachers were able to work effectively with all children, Alison Jerrard described an initiative to help staff recognise their own issues that might impact on their reactions in the classroom. It was important for staff to know how to de-escalate situations, but to be aware that any help to particular students should not be at the expense of others in the class. Alison Jerrard spoke of how exclusions have a huge impact on staff, who realise that the exclusion can have quite a devastating and long term effect on a student. Teachers will do everything they can to avoid exclusions happening. Fixed term exclusions had dropped significantly, and it was felt that considered use of a fixed term exclusion early on could have a beneficial effect in preventing further fixed term exclusions. It was also pointed out that the final decision on a permanent exclusion was down to the governors, not the class teachers.

### Key Issues for School Improvement (pages 65-66)

Alison Jerrard, the secondary headteacher representative, spoke of a recent, excellent session facilitated by the Cabinet Member where schools shared plans for increased partnership working. Schools were looking for ways to work together to benefit all pupils. There was a changing partnership format, and schools were keen to involve the local authority in this. Headteachers are ambitious for success for their students and were engaged in developmental work. Alison recognised that the local authority robustly challenged headteachers, and this was welcomed, and the local authority also supports schools to make changes. It was important to recruit and retain the best teachers to work in Merton.

Panel discussed the networking opportunities for schools, noting the Church of England and Roman Catholic school networks, the excellent schools in borough and neighbouring boroughs. The local authority officers were well placed to see opportunities for sharing best practice and brokering partnerships.

Kate Saksena described the ways our Schools Standards and Quality service support schools' self evaluation with individual staff meetings, senior management team meetings, governors meetings, how schools prepare for Ofsted inspections, and how leadership and management is reviewed. Every school in Merton is partnered to share good practice.

Yvette Stanley offered to circulate the service level agreement to panel members to show what school improvement support services are offered. Yvette Stanley also pointed out how schools work very hard to narrow the gap and are very aware of which population groups need help. Yvette Stanley also acknowledged more work was needed on exclusions.

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Sports Partnership/Merton Music Foundation and Appendices (page 67- 75) It was noted that most schools had opted into the Sports Partnership.

A panel member raised the concern that there might be a medium to long-term issue with the experience and expertise held by senior officers at Merton being lost if they moved on elsewhere. Kate Saksena explained how they were working to develop the expertise of headteachers, and the Merton Leaders of Education initiative also helped with succession planning.

The Cabinet Member gave information to panel members about the Merton Education Partnership and explained how well primary and secondary headteachers were working together, and had signed statements for future partnership working. This has made Merton a ground-breaking borough and two schools were federated already. The Cabinet member also commented on how Merton's education data collection and analysis was seen as being sophisticated in comparison to that collected by other boroughs.

**RESOLVED: Panel expressed thanks to officers, staff and all those involved in achieving the excellent progress as outlined in the report.**

### 7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Michael Sutherland introduced this report and explained the commentary to panel.

Michael also added that:

- Line 21 was a new indicator
- Line 31 would have a clearer definition provided for the next panel meeting
- Line 35 Michael would speak to the service manager to gather data

Yvette Stanley added, in response to a panel member's query, that the percentage of initial/core assessments completed time (lines 2 and 3) were a priority and were included on team information boards equally important to timeliness was the quality of assessments and the g timeliness and appropriateness of intervention. In future there are likely to be new indicators which more appropriately address these wider issues as both Ofsted inspections and the Munro Report were leading to reviews of these indicators.

### 8 SERVICE PLANS

Panel members had no comments to make on the CYP service plans.

### 9 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/2012

Agreed as given in the agenda pack.