

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
27 FEBRUARY 2013

7.15PM – 9:10PM

PRESENT: Councillor Jeff Hanna (in the chair), Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Laxmi Attawar, Iain Dysart, John Sargeant (substitute for Karin Forbes), Oonagh Moulton, Linda Scott, Peter Walker, Simon Withey

Co-opted members –Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons (Parent Governor Representative – Secondary School),

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maxi Martin (Cabinet Member for Children’s Services), Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education)

Yvette Stanley (Director of Children Schools and Families), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance), Jan Martin (Head of Education), Kate Saksena (Manager – Merton School Improvement), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Karin Forbes, Alison Jerard, Colin Powell

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2013

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Iain Dysart enquired about the timescales for bringing a report to the Panel on primary school places.

Paul Ballatt agreed to update the Panel when timescales were clearer and for this to be scheduled into the Panels work programme.

5 CELEBRATING SUCCESS – STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN MERTON SCHOOLS 2011/2012

Kate Saksena provided an introduction to the report and explained the process to the Panel of prioritising issues from the data analysis to identify the weakest schools and plan interventions and actions to address issues, for example, looking at services the authority can provide or brokering support from partner organisations. A Strategic Group is comprised of LA officers and headteachers including those from teaching schools, which helps to establish priorities and action to be taken. Targeted work also takes place with identified schools and groups of schools with similar issues to ensure timely improvement.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
27 FEBRUARY 2013

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons expressed anxiety about the judgements made by Ofsted about the success of schools and wondered if this is resulting in more schools looking to go for Academy status. This could result in losing good schools from the local authority community. What impact does this potential have for the council's expansion plans?

Jan Martin explained that all schools have the option to convert to academies should they wish, not just schools judged as 'good'. The council are in touch with schools and they have not expressed an interest in converting to an academy. However, any transference of a school to an Academy would still mean that they are part of the Merton family of schools.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton stated that she was delighted that standards had improved overall but queried Key Stage 1 (KS1) performance. Kate Saksena confirmed that KS1 performance remains the lowest performing area and below the national average. OFSTED previously focused on key Stage 2 but this has shifted to now focus on KS1.

Councillor Peter Walker asked why schools did not have an interest in becoming academies and if this was as a result of the expertise of the Merton Education Partnership. Jan Martin added that she would like to think this was the case. In addition, she felt that small schools would not relish the demands becoming an academy brings.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina commented that she was happy to see that there had been a decrease in persistent absenteeism. Kate Saksena explained that this figure is still too high and is being addressed in various ways, for example, through the implementation of internal exclusion/inclusion units in schools, mentoring, and also fixed term exclusions rather than permanent exclusions being used.

Councillor John Sargeant asked for clarification on the persistent absenteeism figures in the report. Kate Saksena explained that this represented 85% attendance across the year and a 15% threshold.

Councillor Peter Walker asked what we are doing that is different from comparable London Boroughs to ensure improvement. Kate Saksena highlighted the close working relationships with schools and that the council is encouraging heads to work together more closely and act as peers in a supportive capacity to schools, taking a pragmatic approach to address issues. Jan Martin added that in her experience from working in other local authorities, Merton has greater scrutiny and challenge including regular meetings with the Director, member involvement dialogue through the standards committee about work that is being undertaken and regular meetings with the Chief Executive.

Councillor Jeff Hanna enquired if the analysis used to prioritise individual schools requiring intervention was shared with the Standards Committee. Kate Saksena said she was happy to share this information.

Councillor Simon Withey asked how good practice in 'good' schools was

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
27 FEBRUARY 2013

shared with 'poor' schools and, whilst conscious of resource implications, would like to see this good practice disseminated. Kate Saksena confirmed this already happens as 10 Headteachers from good schools work with weaker schools (classed as teaching schools). There is also a lead teacher programme in primary schools, the Merton Expert Teacher programme, the AST programme, Special Leaders in Education programme and various forums sharing good practice. A range of expertise is being built up and used in schools.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked about the governance arrangements in poorer/weaker schools and how heads were being held to account by governing bodies. Kate Saksena informed the Panel that regular training is provided for governors and that OFSTED reports on the effectiveness of the governing bodies has been positive. General and bespoke training is provided and a governor self evaluation process has been developed. Finally, expert governors have been called upon to support other governing bodies and an Interim Executive Bard can be set up by the council where appropriate/necessary. Training on the new OFSTED framework will be provided shortly. The National College is also providing an expert governor role training programme which is being looked at.

Amanda Stuart Fisher stated that she was bemused by recent comments in the news about the capability of governors as they deal with complex and lengthy agendas at each meeting, the role is extremely time consuming. Governors account for the time they spend, training they attend etc.

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons asked about school improvement was being driven through the education system for those that have SEN. Kate Saksena explained that the gap shown is between the average and the lowest achieving 20% and that this has gotten worse in the last year but that this is not a trend. There also issues surrounding identification of SEN early. Training for the various staff that undertake these assessments or work closely with students is being taken forward.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked why we were not performing so well in this area for some specific groups. Kate Saksena explained that this is for a number of reasons, including the child's background, language development etc. More children from these groups are from some of the weaker schools.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked about the phonic tests and the results shown. Kate Saksena explained that the phonics tests generated strange results in this first year of roll out and that the accuracy of data is questionable. Some schools were also unprepared or not happy about the test and in some schools the phonic teaching is not yet good enough but we are addressing this.

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons asked how we are sharing practice to ensure that progress continues at maximum speed to get SEN students to the levels required. Kate Saksena recognised that foundation stage is achieving well but that there should be more work undertaken by teachers.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
27 FEBRUARY 2013

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons asked about the equalities gaps in terms of the phonic screening variation and how they had been addressed. Kate Saksena informed the Panel that for every school data is gathered to determine which ethnic groups are underachieving. Conversations are then held with schools around these pupil groups. Schools are getting better at identifying termly any child that is not making sufficient progress and the appropriate measures are put into place. Evaluation of these interventions is encouraged. The focus is firmly placed on the individual pupil.

Councillor Peter Walker asked if the team were happy with the attainment levels in relation to achievements by ethnic group. Kate Saksena explained that in some areas there are issues but that improvements have been made. Yvette Stanley added that this is a complicated picture but that there is a focus on individual children, specific groups and cohorts so that schools can target their efforts to work to close these gaps.

Councillor Peter Walker asked if social class was accounted for in the results as well as ethnic origin. Jan Martin explained that detailed free school meals analysis were undertaken and that schools consider, the child's background including the family dynamic and provide holistic support for children..

Councillor Oonagh Moulton asked if the department were homing in on performance in terms of maths and English. Councillor Agatha Akyigyina commented that she was happy that the department were aiming to get results above the national average.

Amanda Stuart Fisher asked what success new initiatives implemented in schools to tackle exclusions have had. Kate Saksena commented that there had been two schools trialling/about to implement these internal units and that it was therefore difficult to judge at this stage.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked what was being done about absence figures. Jan Martin explained that the council have tried to get a better flow of communication with schools. Councillor Maxi Martin added that a liaison group had been set up with ladies attending mosque to discuss sending children to school and avoiding absence etc.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked what support was provided to students that did have English as a first language who were regularly absent. Councillor Iain Dysart asked how often absence could be pre-empted by asking parents to contact the school. Jan Martin explained that targeted work was being undertaken in schools and that most schools do undertake first day calling. Welfare Officers liaise with families to ensure this doesn't happen. The council can impose a fixed penalty notice and fine for non attendance if necessary.

Councillor Peter Walker thanked Kate Saksena and her team for the high standard of results and work undertaken. The Panel supported Councillor Peter Walker's statement.

Councillor Jeff Hanna extended appreciation to all the staff in schools and

looked forward to hearing about further improvements.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

6 BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina commented that it would have been helpful to have received a more detailed breakdown of which Head Teachers and teachers were of BME origin. Jan Martin responded by informing the Panel that this information would be too detailed and enables certain Head teachers to be recognised. Their permission to share their information had not been sought for this report and was therefore inappropriate.

Councillor Peter Walker queried the percentage of the non white population shown in the report stating that the BME population had grown but that only 16% of Head Teachers are non white and why this was the case and what aspirations the council had to increase this figure.

Councillor Jeff Hanna clarified that the Department for Education definition of BME includes white non British Head teachers.

Yvette Stanley added that this continues to be a national issue and that the council is proactively seeking to increase the supply of teachers of BME origin through delivering a programme for developing black leaders and that solid improvements in this area have been made albeit there is more to do. However, it has also resulted in a number of BME teachers and Head teachers getting a promotion in other boroughs which is unfortunate as some other boroughs pay higher salaries than Merton does.

Councillor John Sargeant asked what the total pool of BME teachers and Head teachers was that we are working with.

Yvette Stanley informed the Panel that the council do not have data on staff profiles as not all schools buy the payroll and not all staff disclose ethnicity. There are estimated to be c16-19% of BME teachers overall and middle and senior leaders and head teachers that are involved in the leadership programmes Merton offers. Merton Council is ambitious to do more.

Councillor Jeff Hanna asked what could be learned from other authorities. Jan Martin confirmed that exploring best practice that could be adopted was undertaken through the South West London Education Partnership.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina asked if current BME Head teachers were involved in the peer support programme offered to schools. Jan Martin added that she did not have this information available at the meeting.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report and agreed to consider reviewing the situation when planning the programme for the coming Council year.

7 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Councillor John Sargeant asked about the peers involved in the Ending Gang

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
27 FEBRUARY 2013

and Youth Violence programme.

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons informed the Panel that, as a member of a peer review group for the programme looking at another authority, she could confirm that a range of people in various positions within the police, education, health, clinical psychology, safeguarding and social workers with expertise in a number of areas. All peers underwent the accredited LGA Peer Review Training programme and there is also representation from voluntary and community sector organisations.

Jan Martin agreed to bring the results of the peer review back to the Panel in due course.

Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons asked if detail on the partnership between Melrose School and the SMART centre could be brought to this Panel for discussion. Jan Martin added that this was not a formal federation but that the department would be happy to share information and provide an update to the Panel if it was of interest.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

9 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

10 MERTON CHILDRENS SERVICES: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

RESOLVED: Panel thanked the department for compiling the Glossary.