

**Committee: Council**

**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019**

Wards: All wards

**Subject: Strategic Objective Review: Children and Young People**

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children Schools and Families

Lead members: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cabinet Member for Children Services

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Sharon Buckby, Interim Head of Service for Policy, Planning and Performance

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## **Recommendations:**

A. That Council discuss and comment on the contents of the report.

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The report provides Council Members with information on key developments affecting Children and Young People with a focus on Schools.
- 1.2. Council at its meeting in March 2016 approved the Business Plan 2016-2020. Each meeting of the Council will receive an update on progress against one of the strategic themes. The report provides council with an opportunity to consider progress against the priorities under the 'children and young people' theme.

## **2 DETAILS**

### **2.School Place planning**

2.1 Merton in its role as the Local Authority seeks:

- To provide the highest standards of education and ensure all our schools are good or outstanding;
- Results for attainment and progress which compare with the best in London;
- To ensure that all children and young people enjoy learning opportunities, feel rewarded by their experience and achieve their full potential;
- Provision which contributes to the broader well-being of children and families
- Provision which is a positive choice for families

2.2 The following sections consider the school provision in the sectors of mainstream primary, mainstream secondary, and special provision

### **Primary school places**

2.3 With regard to primary school places, the council experienced an exceptional increase in demand for places, which required a substantial increase in reception year (first year of primary school) places from 2008 to 2015. In 2017/18 there were more pupils in Merton primary schools for more than a generation – a rise of 4,367 pupils on roll (34%) compared to 11 years previously.

2.4 However, in 2016/17 there started to be a drop in demand for reception year places that has continued to 2018/19. The GLA forecast is for the reception year roll to now be relatively stable for the forthcoming years (and September 2019 admissions preference data confirms this), but as the lower numbers flow through all year groups there is forecast to be some 1,300 less pupils in primary school than the peak, though still 3,000 more than in 2006/07. Uncertainty over migration patterns and future live births will also impact on demand.

### **Secondary school places**

2.5 With the substantial increase in demand for primary school places starting in 2008, it follows that the increase in demand for year 7 (the start of secondary school) places has followed seven years later. Following the significant increase in demand for reception year places in September 2011, the biggest increase for year 7 places has been, as expected, in September 2018.

2.6 However, the pattern of demand for Merton secondary schools is very different with the families willing to travel much greater distances and parental preference patterns being more significant.

2.7 For many years Merton has been a net 'exporter' of pupils i.e. more Merton resident children travel to out of the borough state schools for their secondary schooling than the other way around, or 'imported'.

2.8 While in the five years from 2010 to 2015 Merton became a greater exporter of pupils, which has reduced the level of increase prior to 2018, this has reversed over the last couple of years, and particularly for the forthcoming September 2019 entry.

2.9 September 2018 saw the largest single year increase in demand for year 7 places in over a generation with the year 7 roll being 217 more than the previous year.

2.10 Although the resident population for 2019 is stable compared to 2018, Admissions offer day information indicates that there will be a 6% increase in Merton residents attending Merton schools. This is a testament to the increase in standards over a number of years. Officers are currently in discussion with secondary headteachers regarding some extra places being provided for September to meet demand.

### **New School (Harris Academy Wimbledon)**

- 2.11 The council was able to facilitate the opening of Harris Academy Wimbledon just when it was needed to meet the increase in demand for secondary school places. After the “pre-opening” status as a Free School was given by the Secretary of State for Education in spring 2015 the council worked closely with the government’s ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) and the Harris Federation as an effective means to ensure the council could deliver the additional school places required.
- 2.12 After extensive site searches by both the council and ESFA it became clear that the only means to ensure the school could be delivered was for the council to work actively with its landholdings, and the complexities to deliver a site are well documented in council papers, including Cabinet in July 2016 and December 2017.
- 2.13 Harris Wimbledon opened in a temporary site provided by the council at Whatley Avenue, SW20 (former Adult Education building) in September 2018. The building is only big enough for some 350 pupils so it is essential for the High Path site to be ready for September 2020. Following approved planning permission we are now on course to do this.
- 2.14 The new school has proved popular with parents, being fully subscribed in its first year and for September 2019.
- 2.15 Since rolls at the other state funded schools have either remained stable or grown in this period the new Harris Academy Wimbledon School is currently meeting the council’s objective of providing additional basic need places, increasing choice, and not adversely impacting on existing schools.

### **Special school places**

- 2.16 LB Merton caters for pupils with SEN (Special Educational needs) through mainstream schools, specialist provision within mainstream schools (“additional resourced provision”), special schools, and use of independent provision. For children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan which replaced SEN statements) there are three maintained special schools; in addition three primary and three secondary schools provide specialist provision for pupils with ASD (autistic spectrum disorders) and SCLN (Speech, language and communication needs. There is also a Pupil Referral Unit (SMART centre) which operates under the same management as Melrose, our special school for pupils with SEMH (Social, emotional and mental health).
- 2.17 When there is not a suitable placement for a child with an EHCP within the state funded sector the council is financially responsible for commissioning suitable specialist placements within the Independent sector.
- 2.18 The growth in demand for SEN placements has received national attention recently, and the problem is significant in Merton.
- 2.19 The council has been active in seeking special school expansion in recent years, through a new site and then expansion of Perseid School, additional

Resourced Provision (ARP) at Hatfield, and the previous and present expansion of Cricket Green School. However, this has not stemmed our increased reliance on Independent Schools and as the council's capital programme for 2019/20 and beyond includes funding for further expansion of SEND provision.

### **Capital works and building condition**

2.20 Schools are responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of their building but the Responsible Body (The council in the case of Community Schools) is responsible for more significant capital works. The council manages these works with technical staff either in the Corporate Facilities Management team or, for major projects, outside design consultants. To ensure best value, works are procured according to the council's standing orders and for major projects a design team regularly monitors the projects with a professional Quantity Surveyor to monitor value for money.

2.21 From the late 2000s the priority for the council has been to meet the basic need for sufficient school places, but there has been a growing maintenance backlog which was identified in condition surveys completed for all Community Schools in 2018. To address this, the council has increased its annual budget for capital maintenance of Community Schools to £1.9 million. Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies have similar capital programmes for maintenance but the money is held by the DfE.

### **3. Achievement 2017/18 in Merton Schools <sup>1</sup> (Standards Report)**

3.1 The recently published Standards Report 2017- 2018 clarifies the national and local context for schools in Merton and identifies how the Local Authority (LA) has worked with schools to secure and maintain improvement. The Standards reports are considered a year in arrears due to the national validation and reporting process.

3.2 The proportion of schools judged to be good or better in Merton rose from 88% to 93% over the course of the academic year. This proportion is above the London and national averages. All of the Council's secondary schools continued to be judged to be good, with the proportion judged as outstanding rising to 63% (well above national and local averages). Three of the Borough's 44 primary schools were not yet judged to be good or better as of August 2018. This means that 93% of primary schools were judged to be good or better at that point, which is above the national average of 87% for this educational phase.

3.3 Of the three remaining schools judged to require improvement as of August 2018, all are in the primary phase. All of these schools are receiving intensive support and challenge from Merton officers.

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<sup>1</sup> Full standards report can be accessed via the meeting webpage [here](#) (to follow)

- 3.4 With regard to pupil outcomes, national rankings continue to be very strong in the progress measures at KS2 and for GCSE. Merton's performance has improved in comparison with the previous year in most indicators. In the three indicators where there have been drops in comparison with the previous year, these have been very small. The quartile performance in relation to the Borough's statistical neighbours and to other Outer London boroughs identifies that although there have been some improvements, there have also been some relative drops in performance in comparison, identifying where further improvements could still be secured.
- 3.5 In the EYFS, Merton pupils maintained their strong performance. At 73.5%, the proportion of children achieving the GLD remains in line with the London and outer London averages and above the national average. Performance in all areas of learning is above the national averages for 'Exceeding' standard (and in some areas, well above), whilst performance at the expected standard is in line with national averages.
- 3.6 85% of pupils reached the expected standard for phonics decoding in Merton in Year 1, an improvement since 2016 of five percentage points. This maintains the LA's strong performance, which is above the national average, and in line with the London and Outer London averages.
- 3.7 Outcomes at Key Stage 1 have remained in line with or improved on performance last year (with the exception of Greater Depth in reading where there was a drop of one percentage point). In reading and maths, performance is in line with the more challenging Outer London average; in writing, there have been further improvements, and performance is above the national average. Further focus is now required to ensure the performance of Merton's pupils matches that of their Outer London peers.
- 3.8 At Key Stage 2, the progress scores in reading, writing and mathematics, replicating the strong performance with regards to attainment, are above the national and London averages, and rank Merton 8th, 23rd and 6th in the country respectively. The improvement in ranking for the writing progress score is particularly pleasing following focused action by the LA and schools. However, performance in this subject is still not as strong as in reading and maths, and so focused attention will continue to be given to it so that it is closer to the London average. No Merton school is below the Floor Standard this year. No Merton primary school is deemed to be below the 'coasting' standard.
- 3.9 Performance in Merton secondary schools at KS4 remains very strong. At 0.44 the Progress 8 score in Merton is well above national and London averages, and ranks the Borough 9th in the country. In the Attainment 8 indicator, Merton's average (49.6) is above the national and the London averages. The proportion of pupils achieving grades 9-4 in the EBacc subjects, including English and maths

rose by three percentage points this year to 34% which is above local and national averages. No Merton school was below the Floor Standard this year. No secondary school is deemed to be below the 'coasting' standard.

- 3.10 When considering post 16 outcomes for all Level 3 qualifications together, students in Merton perform above the national and the London averages, and the national rank in this indicator has improved from 50<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>. When looking separately at the A level, Academic and Applied General groups within the Level 3 cohort, performance is also above national and local averages. This is an improvement on performance last year. The very small group of Tech level students perform above the London averages, but just below the national average. In particular it should be noted that the average grade for Applied General students is a 'Distinction –' which is above the London and national averages of 'Merit +'.
- 3.11 Attendance in Merton is above the most recent national and London comparative data for secondary and special schools, and in line with these averages for primary schools. The persistent absence figure has risen by 0.5 percentage points. However, based on 2017 performance we predict that Merton will continue to be better than national and London averages.
- 3.12 There were no permanent exclusions in primary and special schools during 2017-2018. The number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools has decreased significantly to be below the most recent national, London and outer London averages This is against a national rising trend of permanent exclusions. The number of fixed term exclusions has fallen in primary, secondary and special schools (significantly so for secondary schools), and are below London and national averages.
- 3.13 The number of CME off roll cases has remained static as the school population has risen. The clear up rate in 2017-18 improved again to 95% within one month. However there were less cases closed at the end of the year. This was due to some admissions cases being opened at the last panel of the year and some SEN cases awaiting placement for the start of the autumn term in a new school. The numbers of pupils vulnerable to becoming CME has risen again for the third year. More cases were closed despite the volume being higher. 61% were actioned within 3 months which is an improvement. We have seen a rise in the number of children within the vulnerable cohort who have EHCPs from 22 in 2016-17 to 41 in 2017-18. This will be investigated but is related in part to demand exceeding provision.
- 3.14 The rise is due to a complex range of factors and there are few clear trends. There is a rise in primary and secondary with the highest levels in KS4. We have looked by school in and out of borough and the increase is not related to any schools in particular other than the poor Ofsted outcome at an Independent School

and any alternative faith based schools out of borough being full. Other wider trends relate to child mental health, issues not being resolved with the school, parents waiting for a school to have vacancies, wanting a form of curriculum not available in the state system and parents are more aware of their rights to EHE and are choosing this option.

## **4 Ofsted**

4.1 Ofsted have published a proposed new Inspection Framework and Handbook for schools, for implementation from September 2019. The new Framework and Handbook are currently being consulted upon, but some significant changes can be expected. These could include:

- A new sub-judgement for the 'Quality of Education' which will look at a school's curriculum, how it is taught and assessed and the resulting outcomes for pupils.
- Inspectors continuing to focus on published outcomes from points of statutory assessment (eg end of key stages) but not looking directly at schools' own in year data.
- A separate sub-judgement for pupils' 'Personal Development' to 'bring greater attention and focus to what education providers do to educate learners in the broadest sense, including the development of character and preparing them for life in modern Britain'.
- An extension for Section 8 inspections (currently commonly called 'short' inspections) from one to two days.
- On-site preparation by the lead inspector prior to an inspection, effectively meaning that there will be at least one inspector on site for a total of two and a half days.
- A focus on ensuring leaders are engaging with teachers meaningfully to manage workload.
- A focus on inclusion so that 'the system can accommodate, and cater for, the needs of all learners of all ages', and to ensure that 'schools do not remove, or lose, pupils from their roll for reasons other those in the best educational interests of those pupils'.

4.2 Senior inspectors from Ofsted (HMI) have presented to Merton schools about these proposed changes. Schools have also received a briefing from Merton School Improvement to enable them to gain a more detailed understanding of the handbook, and to support their response to the consultation process about the proposed changes. Further support will be provided when the Framework and Handbook are published in their final forms.

## **5. School Funding**

5.1 Schools across the country are experiencing pressures on their budgets. This is exemplified in Merton by the fact that 14 schools approached the Council to set deficit budgets in 2018/2019.

5.2 This has resulted in schools needing to look very carefully at their budgets to ensure that they are achieving best value for their pupils. Some schools have restructured staff, particularly support staff to find necessary savings whilst being very mindful of the need to continue to provide pupils with the support they need. For example, in a primary school, this could take the form of the work of teaching assistants being clearly focused towards classes in the school where there are higher levels of need, and moving away from the model of each class having its own teaching assistant.

5.3 Schools are working together to try to find financial efficiencies through shared working, particularly through the school clusters. The Merton schools' partnership 'Attain' has financial stability as one of its main priorities and is looking to identify projects to support schools with this issue, for example through the development of peer review of finances.

## **6. Elective Home Education**

6.1 There has been a 19% increase in children being electively home educated from the previous year. The numbers being home educated has risen steeply in comparison with the general school population increase. Between 2008 and 2016, the Merton school population grew by 16.8 %, while the numbers being electively home educated rose by 174%. From 2014/15, there has been a jump in secondary numbers. This has continued. There are equal numbers of boys and girls home educating. During 2017– 2018 there were an additional 52 (up from 45 in 2016-17) enquiries by parents about home education who subsequently chose not to. We are seeing a rise in EHE in primary and secondary school and in particular in year 8, 9 and 10.

6.2 These rises are similar to those seen nationally where there was a 40% rise between 2014/15 and 2016/17. The figures for Merton over this same period showed a rise of 26%

6.3 Parents have the right to electively home educate their children. Parents have cited a range of reasons for choosing to home educate, ranging from those that want this philosophically for their child, to situations where they are not happy with the education their child is receiving in school. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) and School Improvement team track these cases and ensure that education is being provided. In agreement with schools, the EWS has now provided schools with a parent clarification sheet which parents are asked to sign so it is clear to parents what they are committing to when they choose to home educate.

6.4 On registering a child as being home educated, checks are made so we are aware if there are any safeguarding concerns. If this is the case the lead professional is informed of this change in education provision and we liaise with them during the process. 6.5% (13 – a rise from 6 in 2016-17) of children who are home educating are or were subject to CIN or CP plans in 2017/18.

## **7. Virtual School**

7.1 The core purpose of The Virtual School, Merton is to ensure that there are high aspirations for all children and young people in public care and to support and challenge all those who work with them to promote their educational achievement and make sure they reach their potential. This includes children looked after by Merton wherever they access education but also those children looked after by other boroughs attending schools and educational settings in Merton. Whilst the majority of the data included in this report focuses on the outcomes of children looked after by Merton, the Virtual School's support for those children looked after by other boroughs is considerable and includes:

- work with the Designated Leads for LAC in Merton schools to ensure their work with all LAC is as strong as possible;
- work with the Merton School Improvement Team to ensure that Merton Schools are working to narrow the gap between the educational attainment of all Looked After Children and their non-looked after peers
- ensuring that continuity of education for looked after children from other boroughs is achieved by prompt admission to Merton Schools.

7.2 In addition, The Virtual School has responsibility for the distribution of the Pupil Premium Grant for Looked After Children to remove barriers to learning and ensure that pupils make accelerated progress.

7.3 In addition, and in compliance with The Children and Social Care Act 2017 and publication of The Statutory Guidance for the promotion of Education for Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Care Leavers for Local Authorities, February 2018, The Virtual School now has the responsibility to ensure that children who have left care by an Adoption Order, Special Guardianship, or Child Residence Order and are educated in Merton, are supported in their school or setting.

7.4 The work of the Virtual School is overseen by the Virtual School Steering Group which is chaired by the Head of School Improvement, and attended by the Heads of Education Inclusion, Early Years, SENDIS, Looked After Children, Permanency and Placement, and the Access to Resources Team, as well as the Headteacher of the Virtual School. This governance group receives reports from the Headteacher on a termly basis, and scrutinizes and provides challenge and support the range of work undertaken by the Virtual School.

7.5 The Department for Education (DfE) collects information on the educational outcomes of LAC in Annex A of the SSDA903 return. This information is collected annually for the children who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months on 31<sup>st</sup> March. The data for this cohort of LAC, identified as the 903 cohort, is used in the achievement and other relevant sections to allow valid comparisons with the national dataset.

7.6 The Virtual School Merton collects, analyses and evaluates data but cohort sizes can be very small and so trends in such data should be viewed with caution. It is therefore important to note that a personalised approach to ensuring that each and every child and young person, in every year group succeeds, underpins the strategies and actions of the Virtual School.

7.7 During 2017-18 a total of 129 school aged children were, or became looked after as of 29th June 18, the point of reference for year on year comparative purposes. This includes 51 new children. This is a significant increase from 16-17 when there had been 117 school aged children on or joining the school roll.

7.8 At the end of 2017/18, no child at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage had achieved a Good Level of Development. There is no comparative data at this stage but the results are not surprising since achieving this assessment requires a competence in literacy and numeracy, areas which may have been affected by poor early experience prior to becoming Looked After. The Virtual School will ensure challenge and support is provided to these children's schools to ensure they are given every opportunity to achieve at age related expectations as soon as possible.

7.9 The academic outcomes for Merton LAC were below the 2017 averages for LAC (the latest national comparators available) at KS1 and KS2 in maths, but at the end of year 6 performance in reading and writing was strong.

7.10 There was a significant increase in the year 11 cohort over the academic year, many of whom did not sit GCSEs. However of the thirteen 903 cohort, eight sat GCSE English and maths with 23% achieving English and Maths at grade 4 and above. This is higher than the most recent national average of 17.5 % for LAC. Attainment and progress scores for KS4 pupils are pending

7.11 61 young people were aged 16 to 18 during the academic year 2017 -18. 48 of the young people have pursued and were successful in a range of courses, from Entry Level to Level 3, suitable to their needs and ambitions. Of the 13 young people not in education or training, extensive efforts were made to keep in touch with the young people and support them into appropriate provision. In higher

education 15 care leavers studied for degrees, with two graduating at the end of the academic year.

7.12 This year the average attendance of LAC decreased slightly by nearly two percentage points, largely as a result of a very small group of school refusers. The figure of 91.2% remains below the national average for LAC of 95.7%, and the attendance of LAC remains a priority for the Virtual School.

7.13 There were, again, no permanent exclusions for Merton LAC. This year, however, although the percentage of children receiving fixed term exclusions reduced slightly, and is aligned with national figures, more sessions were missed than in the previous year and so the reduction in sessions missed because of exclusion remains a priority for The Virtual School.

7.14 The Virtual School is ambitious to ensure that all its pupils achieve the best possible outcomes, and that these are reflected in improved outcomes against the national benchmarks. In order to achieve improving outcomes the school will robustly and energetically address the priorities identified at the end of this report through the School's Improvement Plan, in partnership with key stakeholders, the young people and their carers. In the coming year, these priorities will focus in particular on the performance of students with SEN, outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2 where, although there are no national comparisons yet available for LAC, and the cohorts were small, Merton LAC did not appear to perform well against national averages with regard to attainment and progress.

## **8. SEN/D**

8.1 The SEND Strategy 2019- 2022 is currently being refreshed in line with strategic priorities. The Strategy will incorporate the recent Higher Needs Funding review and the Merton capital SEND expansion projects. In addition, the recent EHCP Audit and introduction of POET (Person Outcome Evaluation Tool) will contribute to the development of the Strategy, which will be finalised by March 2019. The most recent SEND needs analysis will also contribute to the content of the SEND Strategy.

8.2A significant part of the Strategy is evaluating and developing the support and training offer for Merton Schools in order to improve the identification and outcomes for pupils at SEN Support. The Merton School Improvement Team has a dedicated inspector for SEND and a newly appointed part-time SEND Advisor that work closely with the SENDIS to continue the work of the SENCO working groups. These groups are developing specific guidance and tools to support progress measurement for pupils with SEND, moderation meetings for the identification of pupils who require SEN Support and developing quality first teaching strategies that support the different primary needs of pupils with SEND.

- 8.3 Portage has been embedded into the wider Early Years service and includes co-delivery from Children's Centres (CC) in partnership with CC and 0-5 Supporting Families staff. The parenting offer for families with children with specialist complex needs continues to develop and more recently, the service has launched the Incredible Years ASD and Language Delay Programme with 25 staff trained in this model. To date, there have been two cohorts of families participating with two programmes scheduled for January 2019 due to high demand.
- 8.4 The additional requirements for free early education have recently included the introduction of a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), the Disability Access Fund and the roll-out of 30 hours childcare and early education for working parents. To date, 50 settings have received SENIF to support 84 children in their provision. Take up of the 30 hour entitlement continues to develop with 960 families accessing this new offer in May and a further 705 in September this year. This data is measured at a point in time and thus each term, the baseline varies because of children moving in and out of eligibility criteria. Due to this, the September cohort data is lower than in May.
- 8.5 The provision of two year-old places continues to be a priority and a key area of focus in the newly established and shared Early Years Hub across Merton and Wandsworth. The Wandle Early Years Hub is funded by the Greater London Authority and aims to provide opportunities for early years settings, local authorities and other partners to work together to improve outcomes for children by increasing take-up of free early education, improving the quality of early years provision and promoting early years as a career choice. Included in the work of the Hub, Merton's Open College Network Early Years College has successfully achieved Level 3 accreditation for the writing of a 'Working with Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)' training programme. External evaluation of the Hub activity is being carried out and feedback will be shared once published.
- 8.6 There are currently 1800 Education Health and Care plans maintained by the Local Authority and we continue to agree to undertake approximately 30 new EHC needs assessments a month. There are 13 full time equivalent staffing within the SENDIS team. There are three staff undertaking new assessments, six staff working 0-14years and four staff working with pupils aged 15-25years. The average caseload for staff within the casework teams is 176 pupils per staff member.
- 8.7 The EHC data shows that 91% (Jan 2019) of requests for plans reach panel in 2 weeks. 57% (YTD in Jan19) of new plans were issued within the 20-week timescale. There is currently a business case being considered for the SEND Integrated Service to procure the EHCP Hub which is an IT portal which should improve transparency and timeliness while clearly tracking progress in regards to timeframes. It is hoped that the EHC Hub will be in place by April 2019. There continues to be positive engagement with children and young people

8.8 Merton is continuing to monitor the progress and implementation of SEN reforms. A SEND dashboard is being developed that draws together a range of SEN indicators and compares Merton's performance against its statistical neighbours and national outcomes as well as showing trends over time. This will help with identification of strengths and weaknesses in performance, support the planning and setting of targets and demonstrate impact and effectiveness, giving a sharper line of sight on practice.

8.9 The views of parents and carers are central to ensuring that Merton is complying with the spirit of the Code of Practice 2014. We gain the views of parents and carers in multiple ways. As part of the continuous improvement agenda within SENDIS we have parental and carer representation on the following:

- SEND Implementation Focus Groups x 7
- Kids First SEND Implementation Group
- Patient Engagement Group (CCG)
- Merton Information Advice and Support Steering Group
- Transport Assistance Working Group
- EHCP Quality Assurance Working Group
- Autism Strategy Steering Group
- Preparation for Adulthood Board

8.10 In addition to seeking the views of parents/carers from the above groups, the Head of SENDIS attends regular sessions with Kids First Parent Forum to answer specific questions raised by parents and to hear feedback on areas for development across the SEN process. Although Merton has low Tribunal rates (four Tribunals lodged with the Tier 1 Tribunal in 2018 academic year), we take the lessons learnt from this to amend our practice.

8.11 Positive feedback from parent/carers included that Merton SEND was reported to be accessible and available to parents if they had questions or concerns pre or post EHCP process. Specific case officers were supportive and explained the EHC needs assessment and Annual Review processes well, and were knowledgeable regarding local resources available to parents. There was evidence of collaborative working during the EHC needs assessment including health and education professionals. The referral process was clear and the decision about whether the LA would take an EHC needs assessment were made in a timely manner. There is also evidence of clear communication between allocated workers within SEN and parent's/carers

8.12 The areas for development include the timeliness of undertaking an EHC needs assessment and issuing a Final Plan within the 20-week timescale, which is currently at 57%. The capacity of partner agencies to meet their 6-week deadline for providing professional advice is impacting on the timescales which parents are understandably concerned about. This is particularly in relation to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and Occupational Therapy (OT). There is an active recruitment drive to employ qualified SALT and OT to meet the demand for assessment and provision delivery. Parents/Carers have

understood the delays and some have chosen to wait to receive the professional advice rather than issuing a plan within 20 weeks that does not clearly outline the necessary outcomes and provision.

- 8.13 Parents reported that there was variable advice from Social Care and Health colleagues and identified the need for outcomes training as part of workforce development, particularly in relation to specificity of provision and Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes. We are addressing this through additional training for Social Care and Health teams and support in understanding their role in co-producing EHCP's and in providing clear outcomes and provision for their relevant sections of the Plan. A dedicated social worker is to be allocated to coordinate work across Education and Social Care.
- 8.14 Parents/carers stated that the S.19 principle "supporting and involving children and young people" required further development. Children and young people should be contributing at the point of referral for an EHC needs assessment and during the assessment process and any subsequent reviews of the plan. Contribution from parents is stronger than contribution from young people at this time.
- 8.15 Parents/Carers expressed some concerns about the Annual Review process and stated they would like to support the development of Annual Review Guidance and a review of the current Merton Annual Review documentation to ensure that schools and parents/carers understand the purpose of the meeting and the statutory timescales for the Annual Review. Parents/Carers would like to see further embedding of the person-centred approach to Annual Reviews. The EHCP Quality Assurance group which is being established and will include parental/carer representation, will undertake this development work in the coming term
- 8.16 A few parents identified the need for a Q&A handout and guidance for parents regarding the EHCP process. Initial work has already begun on this and will be published on the Local Offer. Identification from parents/carers of need for training in relation to the EHCP processes.
- 8.17 To address this we are enhancing information on journeying through the SEN support and EHCP process with an online route map and toolkit for parents and carers.
- 8.18 In line with parental/carer feedback it has been agreed that the LA needs to implement a consistent and robust process for gathering the views of parents/carers and young people going through the assessment process and at annual reviews. The LA commenced using the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool in January 2019. POET has been designed to capture the views of children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners so that results can be triangulated to establish the key process conditions associated with positive outcomes. Testing has already demonstrated that POET has the potential to provide a straightforward and powerful way of finding out about the experience of obtaining an EHCP and in some cases a personal budget and related outcomes.
- 8.19 The Children and Young People's POET has been developed by In Control and the Centre for Disability Research at Lancaster University with

funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners from six local authority areas volunteered to work on the development of the tool. Please find included in this report the POET parent/carer questionnaire.

- 8.20 Parents were surveyed as part of the Higher Needs Funding Review and were concerned about the amount of local specialist provision which resulted in pupils accessing schools out of Borough. Perseid school has recently been expanded and a successful capital bid will mean that the LA will be expanding Cricket Green School in addition to adding numbers to the Additionally Resourced Provisions in local schools with 136 places.
- 8.21 In response to the feedback from parents that the LA has received over the last year a number of actions have been taken which include:
- Training programme implemented for SCO's regarding annual review processes and requirements
  - The Designated Medical Officer has developed a standardised template for professional advice from paediatricians to improve health input to EHCP's
  - Established working group with SENCO's to develop outcome tracking tool
  - Introduction of the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool to ensure regular views are sought from parents/carers/young people and professionals.
  - Established regular working group to review Parent/Carer involvement
  - Parent/carer membership of the Preparation for Adulthood Board
  - Capital bid for expansion of local provisions. Including expansion of Cricket Green and a new Additionally resourced provision. We hope to expand the local offer by 156 school places.
- 8.22 Future developments directly resulting from parental feedback include the review of EHC documentation (referral, EHC Needs assessment, EHC Plan and Annual Review documentation) as part of the implementation of the EHC Hub. In addition a training program will be developed and delivered to health and social care colleagues to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and to ensure that the provision outlined in the professional advice are clear and specific.
- 8.23 The LA will work with schools on a robust planned phase transfer process for nursery to reception, primary to secondary and post 16+ to ensure that all pupils have a named placement by the Feb 15/31 March deadline. The timetable will be communicated to the parent carer forum and circulated to all parent/s/carers and young people in phase transfer cohorts in October/November 2019 to ensure that the LA has parental and young person preferences by December 2019 for consultation.

## **9. Participation of 16-18 year olds**

9.1 The proportions of young people who are Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET), or whose status is not known, have again fallen and are significantly better than national averages. Performance in all three indicators continues to place Merton in the top quintile of performance nationally. Merton NEET and not known combined score is the 10th lowest of all authorities nationally.

9.2 The latest NEET figure (January 2019) stands at 1.6% - this is presently lower than England (2.4%) and only slightly above London (1.5%). Overall, the male gender group has a higher rate of young people within the NEET group and is marginally over-represented when compared against the cohort percentage. Others over-represented within the NEET group include the White ethnic group, young people with SEN, LAC, teenage mothers and those supervised by the YOT.

Vulnerable Groups	Totals	%	Yearly Change	Cohort		
<b>SEN</b>						
EHCP + Historic Statement	5	8.3%	-4.8%	↓	231	5.9%
Looked After/In Care	1	1.7%	-3.3%	↓	20	0.5%
Teenage Mother	3	5.0%	3.4%	↑	4	0.1%
Pregnancy	0	0.0%	-4.9%	↓	0	0.0%
Supervised by YOTS	0	0.0%	-8.2%	↓	16	0.4%
Care Leaver	1	1.7%	1.7%	↑	2	0.1%
Substance Misuse	0	0.0%	0.0%	↔	0	0.0%
Carer	0	0.0%	0.0%	↔	1	0.0%
<b>SEN Support (no EHCP)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

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9.3 The My Futures Team are continuing to run a series of successful programmes to support vulnerable young people that are education-based and serve to develop personal skills including:

**Holiday Programmes** (Summer and October half-term) – Holiday programmes engage the most vulnerable Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) and pre-NEET young people and are aimed at inspiring, educating, promoting appropriate behaviour and improving social skills and self-confidence. Activities have ranged from white water rafting, photography workshops, employment workshops and creating business plans. The programme has been successful in giving disadvantaged young people opportunities that they normally would not be able to access and has grown significantly in the last year.

**Towards Employment Programme** – This programme offers a chance to acquire work experience for a young person to get their foot in the door of a company with the view of gaining an apprenticeship there. The My Futures service works closely with other teams across the Council, focusing on young people who are NEET, looked after or working with the YOT. Many have been offered

employment/apprenticeships at the end of a successful work placement. This programme continues to grow with the My Futures team continually building links with new businesses keen to work in partnership to offer real job opportunities to NEET young people.

**University Programme** – This is open to academically able young people who cannot afford university and those with no family history of university attendance. Due to a successful programme last year, the My Futures service were able to support two young people into courses this past September along with a further two planning on applying next year. This was achieved via attending workshops at Kingston University, identifying grants and available funding and breaking down many myths around student life and costs involved in gaining a degree. The same programme is scheduled to run again in January 2019.

**Social Media** – The My Futures service has recently launched social media platforms on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to enable the wider Merton community to access ETE opportunities as many young people do not meet the threshold for a referral for direct keywork. The team can now signpost the same ETE opportunities to all young people in Merton as well as being able to remain connected with young people once cases are closed.

NEET operational group meetings in relation to looked after children have been taking place every 3 weeks since September 2018 with the aim of increasing EET opportunities, identifying relevant and realistic plans and reviewing support provided. The group tracks the action plan for each young person and ensures management oversight of cross-departmental agencies which evidences EET care planning. A dedicated worker is in place within the Virtual School who works directly with this cohort

**10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

No specific implications for this report

**11. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

No specific implications for this report.

**12. TIMETABLE**

No specific implications for this report.

**13. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**14. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**15. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

None

**16. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

None

**17. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**18. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

**19. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None