

## **Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 11th January 2023**

Wards: All

### **Subject: Departmental Update**

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Maisie Davies - Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships

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### **Recommendations:**

A. Members of the panel to 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 members of the panel with information on key developments affecting the Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department, and not covered elsewhere on the agenda. It focuses on those aspects of particular relevance to the department.

## **2 DETAILS**

### **CHILDREN, LIFELONG LEARNING & FAMILIES**

- 2.1 Since the last update Children, Lifelong Learning and Families were pleased to receive the outcome of our joint targeted area SEND inspection revisit. Inspectors found that sufficient progress had been made in Merton against the areas of weakness identified in the 2019 SEND inspection. We are proud of the work of all our staff across the CSF Department, and also our wider partners, who support children and young people with SEND. The recognition of improvement is testament to their hard work and dedication to improving services and outcomes for children.

### **SEND Inspection Revisit**

- 2.2 Members received an update in November regarding Merton's Joint Area SEND inspection revisit, which took place in October. The purpose of the revisit was to determine whether Merton had made sufficient progress in addressing the three areas of weakness detailed in our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) following our 2019 SEND inspection.

- 2.3 The letter has now been published, which confirms that Merton has made sufficient progress in addressing all of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection, and the WSoA has been discharged.
- 2.4 The report highlighted changes implemented by Merton, *“mean that there is increased opportunity for the health needs of children and young people with SEND to be identified, and for requests for the most appropriate advice to be made”*.
- 2.5 The report also noted that the improvements took place against the backdrop of Covid-19, noting that *“despite the challenges of the pandemic, leaders have made sure that improvements have been sustained”*.
- 2.6 Inspectors also recognised that parents and carers had noticed a shift in culture. *“They feel respected, included and listened to. They can identify specific ways in which they now influence the direction of SEND policy. They are working with leaders to co-produce information and advice... so these are written in a way that is more easily understood”*.
- 2.7 The Department continue to work with partners to build on the positive findings of the revisit to further improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Merton. The full report is available at Appendix 1.

## **Supporting Schools**

### **Alternative Education Provision**

- 2.8 Alternative Provision is where a pupil is educated in an establishment which is not designated a maintained school or a special school. This alternative provision may be provided, for example, because the pupil has been permanently excluded from school or because they are so medically unwell they are unable to be in school. The DfE guidance describes it as *“education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.”*
- 2.9 Any school that is established by a local authority to provide alternative provision is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Merton has one PRU which is established on two sites as part of Melbury College. Melbury College provides the joint leadership and governance of Melrose Special School and the PRU. The two campuses of the PRU are Canterbury Campus (which supports pupils with a range of behavioural needs) and Lavender (which supports children with a range of medical needs). Some further information on each campus is provided below.
- 2.10 The majority of pupils supported through alternative provision are in Melbury. However, for a range of reasons, schools and the authority may choose to support a child with their behaviour, or to provide interim education through a referral to another alternative provision provider. These providers may be one-to-one tuition agencies or provide group education. The providers who currently offer group education in Merton are all registered as independent

schools. All alternative provision providers in Merton come under the cross-borough Quality Assurance (QA) System lead by Merton School Improvement and Commissioning. Under this scheme Merton, Wandsworth and Croydon work with providers and undertake QA visits to ensure that providers are delivering well and safely. This list is then shared with schools.

### Canterbury Campus

- 2.11 The Canterbury Campus supports children who have been permanently excluded from school, or who are at risk of exclusion and their school has sought support from the Canterbury Campus. The school also educates children who are new to Merton and may, based on their educational history, find it hard to integrate into a local mainstream school straight away. The majority of children are on dual registration with a mainstream school. In 2019-20 and 2020-21, there were in total 118 and 117 pupils respectively. Post Covid, in 2021-22, there were 136 pupils and currently in 2022-23 there are already 77 pupils, suggesting an increase on last year is very likely.
- 2.12 Canterbury Campus achieves above average attainment when compared to other PRUs. Improvements in pupil behaviour and social skills are tracked and pupils show marked improvements whilst at the school. School attendance at Canterbury is above national and London averages.
- 2.13 Safeguarding children at the Canterbury Campus is a key focus. During 2021-22 there were 36 pupils who were open to social care, including children with a Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan and children who are looked after. So far in 2022-23 there are 28 pupils open to children's social care. The school participates in local authority processes around contextual safeguarding.
- 2.14 The pupil cohort is changing, and the Canterbury Campus are finding that more children require nurture provision to meet pupil needs. Nurture provision provides a safe, predictable and supportive environment with embedded routines to enable children to enjoy their learning. At the heart of nurture provision is a focus on wellbeing and relationships and a drive to support the growth of children.

### Lavender

- 2.15 The Lavender campus supports children who are out of school on medical grounds. In 2021-22 there continued to be an increase in referrals and admissions to Lavender campus. With the expanded space provided by the new building the school now has 39 on role so the school is on target to have 60 pupils which is our expanded capacity.
- 2.16 The students have a high level of complex medical needs, including students who self-harm and struggle with suicidal ideation. There are also students with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and psychosis traits alongside Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), eating disorders, anxiety and depression. The school works in partnership with CAMHS and hospitals. There has also been an increase in students who are open to children's social

care. The school improves outcomes and enables its students to make strong progress.

- 2.17 Increasing levels of concern about young people's mental health and poor school attendance is increasing demand for places at Lavender.

## **Speech and Language Therapy Services**

### Central London Community Healthcare

- 2.18 Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH) NHS Trust provides Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) to children aged 6 months to Reception age for speech sounds, language, fluency, social communication, voice, selective mutism and dysphagia support. At the end of Reception year, the duty of care for children with language and social communication needs is transferred to school or referred to the London Borough of Merton SLT service if they have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) at the end of Nursery.
- 2.19 Children and young people with health needs including Dysphagia, Dysfluency, Speech Disorders and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) needs are offered a CLCH SLT service up to 19 or 25 years of age. Services are offered within community clinics in Merton, children's centres, schools and homes, and there is dedicated SLT based within Merton special schools.
- 2.20 The CLCH services receive an average of 45 to 55 referrals a month and children and young people are offered an initial assessment following triage, and assessment is offered within a 5 day, 20 day or 12 week timescale, dependent upon the nature of the need.
- 2.21 Treatment is offered via 1:1, groups and parent and school staff training sessions. The CLCH SLT service will provide advice for Education, Health and Care needs assessments and annual reviews. The service works very closely with the multi-disciplinary children's therapy services inclusive of Health Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, dietetics and 0-19 services.

### Local Authority SLT

- 2.22 Speech and Language support for children aged 5-16 is provided by the Local Authority service. The team provides the statutory service to support children with Education, Health and Care plans in all Merton mainstream schools and special schools. They will undertake the key assessments (an average of 211 a year over the past three years) and provide the packages of support where an EHCP is agreed. The current EHCP Speech and Language case load is 1334 children and young people. There are currently 20 therapists in the team and three locums. Recruitment of therapists is an ongoing challenge and the team recruits nationally and internationally to cover all posts. The team are well respected and appreciated for their clinical skill, knowledge and support. The team is funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (High Needs Block).

- 2.23 The team also undertake significant preventative training and support for schools to enable them to help children with speech and language needs across the whole school and at SEN support level. They deliver ELKLAN<sup>1</sup> training, which is widely recognised as providing robust support for children, and is designed to support children's communication needs. Currently 75% of primary schools in Merton have ELKLAN trained staff. With school staff turnover this course runs regularly; eight more primary staff were trained this term, and in January the team have training for secondary schools planned.
- 2.24 In addition, the team are rolling out free awareness raising training to all schools on understanding the basics of speech and language. 40% of primary schools were covered in the autumn term and this builds on other universal training programmes such as 'Test for Abstract Language Concepts (TALC)', use of a progression tool, and Lego Therapy.

### **Support for Gifted and Talented Pupils**

- 2.25 In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the term 'gifted and talented' or 'G&T' to describe children who were attaining at a high level at school. Schools largely ceased using the term of 'gifted and talented' when the DfE removed this label from its list of pupil attributes, and encouraged the movement towards a 'mastery' curriculum.
- 2.26 Schools nationally now follow this 'mastery' approach within the National Curriculum, and seek to provide stretch and challenge for all pupils, across the curriculum and through their teaching strategies so that learning 'sticks' and is applied by children in new contexts, independently and ambitiously.
- 2.27 Pupils are challenged in mathematics, for example, by engaging with the appropriate content for their age through rich and sophisticated problems that require them to reason and think mathematically and apply the content to solve problems. All pupils will have opportunities for such experiences; however, some pupils will engage with these problems at different depths. Teachers determine when a pupil is ready to progress to more sophisticated, complex material, not by how quickly a pupil can calculate or recall facts, but how deeply they understand concepts and how well they can build mathematical connections and communicate these through the use of precise mathematical language.
- 2.28 Strategies to challenge the highest attaining pupils include skilful questioning which promotes higher order thinking, non-routine problems and low floor/high ceiling problems requiring pupils to follow their own line of enquiry, make decisions about the mathematics involved and efficiency of methods.
- 2.29 The characteristics of mastery of the curriculum and greater depth learning include children applying a skill or subject knowledge in a range of different contexts and without having recourse to the teacher, showing resilience when

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<sup>1</sup> [Elklan Training Ltd](#)

a task seems demanding, revisiting an aspect of learning after a break and still feeling confident of being able to work without difficulty and being able to explain their understanding to others and perhaps being a learning buddy.

- 2.30 Elsewhere in the curriculum, children may develop specialisms for example in art, music or PE/sport. In Merton there are examples of schools where children's participation in sporting events and competitions have led to them being picked for local and regional teams.

### **Disproportionality – Black Lives Matter**

- 2.31 The Black Lives Matter and Equalities Forum met 6 times (half termly), on Zoom, in the academic year 2021 – 2022. The work of the Forum is delivered largely by officers of Merton School Improvement and of the Education Inclusion Service, particularly the Equalities' Adviser, the Participation and Engagement Manager and the Attain co-ordinator.
- 2.32 Evaluative feedback from Forum members in July 2022 particularly acknowledged the opportunities provided for hearing from guest speakers in education who spoke on Equalities from their lived experience as well as from an academic or professional, research-led background. In January 2022, for example, the guest speaker was Patrick Cozier, the headteacher at Highgate Wood secondary school, who outlined his leadership of the school's approach to 'uncomfortable' conversations about racism and bias and listening and responding to pupil voice regarding experiences of race and racism. In March 2022, Orlene Badu, System Lead for the Young Black Men Project in the London Borough of Hackney presented her work on listening to and engaging with the voice of young people and parents about Black Lives Matter and equalities: *Where have we reached and what should we aim for next?* The Forum has also provided an opportunity for discussion about consultations and reports which should inform and drive our work on anti-racism and equalities. In April 2022, for example, there was a presentation and discussion on the newly published Child Q Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review and we discussed the Inclusive Britain report.
- 2.33 Funded through the schools and local authority partnership, Attain, The Black Curriculum were commissioned to support Merton school leaders through workshops and curriculum consultations. There was a mixed response to their reports and it was agreed that the quality of the eventual feedback was undermined by delays in review and reporting.
- 2.34 A student conference took place in autumn 2021, at which young people created a manifesto and this work with young people is being taken forward by Sukpal Uppal, Participation Manager. At the Merton Race Equality in Education Conference Student Cultural Ambassadors from Ricards Lodge High School led a workshop: *From Powerful Protest to Champions of Change*. Amongst many examples of their impact, they described how they gave feedback about the school policy on hair and head coverings and then reviewed other policies for cultural bias.

- 2.35 In our review of what was achieved by the Forum in 2021 – 2022, members have agreed that a priority for academic year 2022 – 2023 must be to extend the focus on pupil participation and pupil voice in school and council democratic processes. The review of achievements in 2022 and priorities for 2023 are captured in The Strategy to Address Racism and Racial Inequality across Merton Schools 2022 – 2023.

### **Supporting Vulnerable Children**

#### **Supporting Vulnerable Children and with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities**

- 2.36 As at the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, Merton maintained 2,507 EHCPs.
- 2.37 As of the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, the service has received 348 requests for an EHCNA (Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment) since January 2022. In this calendar year the LA has agreed to undertake 310 EHCNAs and agreed to issue 219 EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plan).
- 2.38 The EHCNA process should be completed within 20 weeks. As of 1<sup>st</sup> December, the year to date timeliness for completing an EHCNA is at 80% in the total number of EHCPs being issued within 20 weeks, excluding exceptions.
- 2.39 Following the annual review processes this calendar year the Local Authority has ceased to maintain 165 EHC Plans. 125 children and young people with an EHCP moved out of Merton to another Local Authority and 8 moved abroad. In addition, 79 children and young people with an EHCP moved into Merton and their plan was adopted.

#### **Practice Week**

- 2.40 Children Social Care held practice week from the 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> of November which saw some presentations showcasing the spectrum of services available to children and families. The theme for practice week was 'Keeping Children and Families at the Heart of Practice' and senior leaders and managers heard directly from service users with lived experience as well as from staff working directly with children, young people and families around the innovative practices taking place.

#### **Celebrations**

- 2.41 In this holiday period, the department has hosted several events. There have been two festive parties for our children and young people in care (on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December), followed by a foster carers Christ'mas celebration on 9<sup>th</sup> December. These events allowed us the opportunity to celebrate and nurture our relationships with our carers, and demonstrate our care for the children and young people for whom we are corporate parents.
- 2.42 This month, our children and young people in care designed Christmas cards for the Chief Executive and Executive Directors' offices, which were gratefully received. The departments expressed their gratitude to the children and young people.

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

- 2.43 We held our final Corporate Parenting Board for the calendar year on 8<sup>th</sup> December. The Board reviewed performance from Quarter 2 (22/23) and conducted a deep dive into care leaver data – reviewing the indicators and associated commentary.
- 2.44 This was followed by an update on the work underway around our refreshed ‘Guide to Leaving Care’ which is being co-produced with ‘Our Voice’ (our Children in Care Council) and will continue to provide our children and young people with information about their rights, the roles and responsibilities of the Council, and what help and support they are entitled to and can expect.
- 2.45 The Board was also presented with the Independent Reviewing Officers’ Annual Report (2022). The Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010/15 sets out how local authorities and their partners should fulfil their responsibilities for care planning, placement and review for children in care. Practice is also underpinned by Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), the Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook and the London Child Protection Procedures. The report highlighted areas that are working well, where there is a need for improvement and the associated action plan.

## **Youth Justice Service**

- 2.46 Merton’s Youth Justice Service has received the new ‘Turnaround’ grant from the Ministry of Justice. The grant, which is offered to Youth Offending Teams across England and Wales, is available over three years, and has a focus on early intervention and improving outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system. The overall aims of the Turnaround programme are to:
- achieve positive outcomes for children with the ultimate aim of preventing them from going on to offend
  - build on work already done to ensure all children on the cusp of the youth justice system are consistently offered a needs assessment and the opportunity for support
  - improve the socio-emotional, mental health and wellbeing of children
  - improve the integration and partnership working between YOTs and other statutory services to support children.
- 2.47 Work is underway to implement the project and the grant requirements within Merton.

## **National Review Safeguarding Children with Complex Health Needs in Residential Settings**

- 2.48 The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has led a national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings. As part of the second phase of the review, the Panel has asked all local authorities, with their safeguarding partners, to review children living in



similar types of residential placements, and to respond to the Panel with the outcomes of that review. Merton's Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department have completed the local review and will respond within the allocated timescale. Although we have highlighted some areas for improvement which will be shared with the partnership, our review highlighted good practice with no areas of significant concern in the small number of children's cases which this review applied to.

### **Safety Valve**

- 2.49 The third quarterly Safety Valve monitoring report to DfE was due to be submitted on the 16<sup>th</sup> December. However, we were notified in November that this has now been put back to 20<sup>th</sup> of January due to expected increases in High Needs Block funding (which is the focus of the Safety Valve process) in the local government settlement. That settlement (at time of writing) is not expected until late December 2022. We will provide an update to the February meeting of this committee.

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