

BARNESLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12TH NOVEMBER 2013

10. **Present:** Councillors Worton (Chair), G. Carr, Lofts, Rusby, Saunders and C. Wraith together with co-opted members Mr. J. Winter and Mr W. A. Haigh.

11. **Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

12. **Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2013**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2013 were accepted as an accurate record.

13. **Future Work Programme**

The Chair gave a verbal update in respect of future topics for discussion as part of the work programme. At the meeting in January 2014, improvement plan progress will be discussed; the quarterly performance report will be discussed in March 2014 and the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board annual report and business plan for 2013/14 is the topic for the May meeting. The Chair highlighted that these topics are draft and may be subject to change.

14. **Narrowing the gap in educational performance of vulnerable groups of children and young people**

The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

Phil Lawson Assistant Executive Director, Lifelong Learning, Achievement & Enterprise, and
Sara Morrissey, Head of Barnsley Challenge, Learning & Standards;

Members had been provided with performance information relating to the educational attainment of vulnerable groups including looked after children, SEN, children eligible for free school meals and those children with English as an additional language.

Members acknowledged that the information provided to the Committee must be of a general strategic nature relating to the overall educational performance of children from vulnerable groups and that it should not be possible to identify individuals from it.

The witnesses explained that because of the small numbers of children within some of the vulnerable groups it may have been possible to identify the performance of individual children and it was felt that this would not be appropriate in a public meeting.

Members felt that it would not have been possible to identify individual children as the information requested related to figures and trends, not named individuals. The members felt that the information provided did not enable Members to effectively scrutinise the educational attainment of children from vulnerable groups due to the absence of local and national trend and comparator information for primary and secondary school age children from both vulnerable groups and from 'mainstream' groups. The representatives pointed out that the data provided showed performance of Children in Care(CiC), Special Educational Needs (SEN), Free School Meals (FSM)and Looked After Children (LAC) as well as English as an Additional Language(EAL) for 2011/12 compared to Regional and National Performance. They agreed to provide validated data for 2012/13 in the new year once it has been published by the DfE.. Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the accompanying report provides a narrative of the comparison of these results against national performance.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- i. Why is there no 2011/12 national information provided for some vulnerable groups (for example looked after children)?

It was explained that information which was marked as 'N/A' in the tables was not yet available as it had not yet been released by the Department of Education.

- ii. Why are trends and targets not included in the information provided?

The witnesses highlighted that it is no longer a statutory requirement to set targets and this was removed two years ago. The focus is now on progress. Nationally there is a move away from attainment to individual progress, with expected year on year improvement.

- iii. What is the national expectation for improvement?

The national expectation for improvement is outlined on progression matrices published in RAISE online. These indicate that between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, children should be expected to make at least two levels of progress. Between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, at least three levels of progress should be made relative to children's individual starting points..

- iv. How do Barnsley children in vulnerable groups perform generally?

Trends for primary school children from vulnerable groups in Barnsley are broadly in line with national figures at KS1 and KS2, but more can be done to help them, particularly in terms of School Action Plus. The gap in performance widens between KS2 and KS4 and vulnerable groups perform less well than their peers. Schools are working proactively to reduce this gap by improving the quality of provision in order

to erode the inequalities that persist between the outcomes of vulnerable groups and their peers. It was pointed out that Barnsley has two special schools for children with profound and complex needs which have been judged as 'outstanding'. The small numbers of looked after children in Barnsley make comparisons over time difficult and the performance of individual children can depend on the stories and barriers they meet along the way.

- v. Children for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) perform significantly better than children from other vulnerable groups. Why is this?

It was explained that education is sometimes viewed differently by parents and children of minority ethnic origin. Migrants new to the community have often made a positive decision to improve their life chances and education is seen as key to this. The children have a keen desire to learn and with motivation, aspiration coupled with cognitive ability, rapid progress can be made. Education is viewed as a means to get out of poverty

- vi. Is best use made of resources for vulnerable groups?

It was reported that limited funds are available for vulnerable groups and there is no additional funding. However, individual teachers in schools have developed expertise which they then share with other schools, thus spreading best practice. Schools receive pupil premium funding but if this is only for one or two pupils with additional needs it is not enough to fund another member of staff to work with the children, and the pupil premium must be used more creatively. This issue is currently being explored with headteachers.

Members heard that 'sector-led' improvement is being encouraged in partnership with the Academy Programme. Good schools work with other schools to share expertise and best practice. Members felt that this should be commended as long as the 'good' schools do not stretch themselves too far, thus halting their own improvement.

- vii. How long does it take for a Statement of Educational Needs (SEN)?

This very much depends on the individual child and the severity of need. Before children are assessed for a Band 5 Statement, other initiatives such as School Action and School Action Plus will be but in place. An assessment is completed and the school is expected to adapt to meet the needs of individual children under School Action, funded by the Local Authority. If needs are still not met, additional support will be given under School Action Plus, which is the stage before assessment for a Band 5 Statement. School Action Plus is an age weighted pupil unit formula, where weightings are given to various elements, which are regularly reviewed. This is a way of front-loading resources and may mean that a Band 5 assessment is no longer required. Schools are currently looking at opening up and reviewing how the funding 'pot' can be used most effectively.

The national shortage of Educational Psychologists also holds up progress for Band 5 assessments, leading to schools exploring different ways of meeting the educational needs of children such as sharing expertise and up skilling individual teachers.

vii. How much time do Educational Psychologists spend in each school?

This varies from one school to another, depending on the pupil profile. Each school is visited once per term and has an annual review, with further involvement if required. Schools are best placed to identify what their own requirements are. There are a number of schools with children with complex needs which are effectively met without the need for a Band 5 assessment.

A member highlighted that sometimes moving a pupil to a different school is the solution to meeting their needs. Before a child is excluded from school because of problem behaviour, this is assessed by a panel. It may be that the child needs a fresh start, and may be taken out of mainstream school and placed in Springwell or the Pupil Referral Unit for a period of time before being resettled in mainstream school. Both Greenacre and Springwell have developed expertise and are now using this to help other schools.

viii. A member expressed concerns that once schools become academies they are independent from the authority and no longer work collaboratively with other schools in the Borough.

The witnesses highlighted that the Leader and Cabinet had agreed not to resist the development of academies but actively encourage academies and schools to work in partnership through the development of protocols. There is a chance that 60% of the schools in the Borough could become autonomous. All academies thus far have signed up to the protocols and are committed to collaborative working with other schools.

There is now a lack of national sponsors as the market has tightened and the Secretary of State may suggest sponsors who work in a different way to come forward.

A Member highlighted Shafton ALC as having managed the amalgamation of two predecessor schools effectively. It was originally envisaged that there would be problems with the amalgamation of several schools in to one, but this has not happened and the school benefits from a good environment, where children feel supported and included.

It was explained that there are five key delivery strategies within the 'Barnsley Challenge', the vision to ensure that *all* children in primary and secondary schools in Barnsley attend a good or better school. Transitions between different key stages have been identified as a priority along with improving the quality of teaching.

Secondary schools are now beginning to show signs of improvement, having moved from second to the bottom of the performance table to ninth position. There is a big challenge around the performance of vulnerable groups but there is a firm commitment from to improve.

Headteachers from all secondary schools and academies have agreed to meet on a two-weekly basis. They have delegated senior leaders to lead on projects within the Barnsley Challenge. One project in the programme will look at school

attendance, the causes of non-attendance and strategies to raise attendance, particularly around SEN children and those eligible for free school meals.

A second network is about to start, looking at barriers to progress for vulnerable children and what needs to be done to improve outcomes. This will include looking at what works well and developing a way forward. This demonstrates a firm commitment from educational establishments to working together, irrespective of whether they are schools or academies.

- ix. What can be done about persistent pupil non-attendeers, as these can have a negative effect on the performance of individual schools?

This needs to be done within the context of Barnsley, through re-engaging parents and carers. If education is recognised as valuable they will encourage children to attend school, it is a matter of breaking the cycle. There is a place for enforcement, but this approach does not win hearts and minds and a twin track approach must be adopted.

Attendance seems to be less of a problem at ALCs which are used by the whole community. This needs to be encouraged as the Local Authority pays to keep the buildings open until 10 p.m. for use by the whole community. The vision is that parents and carers will consider adult education for themselves and thereby start to see the value of education.

It was acknowledged that there are issues around the charging policy for the facilities but the schools themselves have been given greater flexibility to overcome this, only charging when affordability is an issue. It was highlighted that there may need to be guidelines about who can use the premises to ensure that they are used for appropriate purposes.

- x. Is there any evidence that parents and carers are taking up the education opportunity for themselves?

This is difficult to quantify but everything is being done to encourage this, as it is important that children receive support at home to supplement school work. Some ALCs have facilities for sporting activities such as 5-a-side football but at the same time encourage people to maybe brush up on their own literacy and/or numeracy. Children's centres now have to engage with parents and carers to signpost them to other services (such as the ALCs) as part of the OFSTED judgement. The changes in welfare reform mean that individuals have to evidence that they are seeking employment or training before they can draw their benefits.

- xi. What is the 'virtual school'?

The virtual school is an amalgam of all the individual schools across the Borough. Representatives of secondary schools meet every term, bringing with them the learning profiles for their school. These are then put together to identify what it means across the Borough and how improvements can be made.

There is also another 'virtual school' which is a statutory requirement, again bringing together learning profiles but this time for vulnerable groups of children. The school

has a named individual as the 'virtual head', whose role it is to keep an eye on the performance of both pupils and individual schools. There is also a 'virtual deputy head' who liaises with social care and monitors children's performance. All schools have a nominated lead for looked after children.

xii. What are there plans for post 16 education in Barnsley?

This is delivered in partnership with Barnsley College at a number of sites, including the Barnsley Academy and Penistone ALC. It cannot be delivered everywhere as there is only one funding 'pot' and a critical number of students are needed to make it viable.

The witnesses were thanked for their attendance and contributions.

IT WAS AGREED that:

- (i) Representatives will be invited back to scrutiny early in the new year to provide the requested information, including trend and comparator information,

and
- (ii) This topic will be revisited at the end of next summer once examination results have been received.