

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CSSC)

11TH NOVEMBER 2014

1. Present:

Councillors Worton (Chair), Rusby, G. Carr, Saunders and C. Wraith together with co-opted members Mr W. A. Haigh and Ms K. Morritt.

2. Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J. Winter in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

3. Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest

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

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2014 were accepted as an accurate record.

5. Educational Outcomes for Children and Young People in Barnsley 2014

Members considered a report of the Director of HR, Performance and communications in respect of the Educational Outcomes for Children and Young People in Barnsley.

The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

Cllr Margaret Bruff, Cabinet Member, People (Safeguarding)
Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Member, People (Achieving Potential)
Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families
Sara Morrissey, Head of Barnsley Challenge (Learning and Standards),
Children, Young People and Families
David Benbow, School Improvement Officer, Children, Young People and Families.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- (i) The figures show that educational attainment is low at key stage 4, why is this the case?

It was pointed out that there is a legacy of under performance from poor standards in our primary schools 8 years ago. Schools have worked hard to enable pupils to catch up; however they have been through the turbulence of school amalgamations. Consequently, results in our secondary schools remain low.

A lot of work has been undertaken to improve performance including brand new schools being built and significant changes in leadership at our secondary schools. The new headteachers are clear about knowing performance in their schools and are focusing funds to ensure closure of the performance gap.

There is now a partnership of secondary headteachers from across the Borough who come together to discuss performance and share thoughts and ideas regarding what works well. This year there has been a record number of pupils gaining 5A*s to C at GCSE based on year-end figures, as well as improved attainment in Maths and English.

- (ii) There are examples of schools coming together where the style of the headteacher has not been welcomed by pupils and parents as there have been tougher rules on behaviour; however vast improvements have been seen as a result of this. These are welcome improvements, therefore are we going to do this with other schools in the Borough?

It was advised that the Council has built strong partnerships with relevant schools and governing bodies. The improved standards at certain schools has acted as a catalyst for other headteachers to make changes in the Borough. Therefore, we are working with them to find out what works well and what doesn't and share this with other schools.

There is also awareness that there has to be a careful balance of school to school support as they have a limited pool of resources and we can't keep pulling on their resources to provide advice and guidance to others.

- (iii) What is in place to support brighter pupils who are achieving the higher grades and want to pursue high aspirations?

The committee was informed that work is being done to try to raise the aspirations of all pupils and help them to improve their results. There is great awareness that results still need to rise and there is a variation between subjects. As a whole, Barnsley is still under the national average but it is evident that year on year progress is being made. In Barnsley, we're seeing a higher proportion of pupils getting higher A-level grades and higher numbers of pupils going to university. We're fighting against low aspirations and working on this to encourage all pupils to do better than expected.

- (iv) Do infant school headteachers join in with secondary school teachers in terms of sharing ideas and encouraging improvements?

It was advised that cross networking is being developed and increased. Last year a Borough-wide transitions project was arranged. The 'Barnsley Challenge' funded a number of projects involving teachers going into different schools and sharing best practice and initiatives. This term, a review is taking place of the activity to see what worked well and to capture the knowledge shared.

Within the Council we are looking at our local structures and how primary and secondary schools can work better together to share good practice as well as

knowledge regarding individual families. Improvements have been made but there is still opportunity to do better. HMI have reported that Barnsley are in the top 5% in terms of improvements made in attainment, thereby are performing much better than the national average.

- (v) What work is being done to improve the transition from primary to secondary schools?

It was highlighted that as well as encouraging increased information sharing between schools regarding individuals and families, through the 'Barnsley Challenge' fund a programme had been undertaken at a school in Penistone. This was where pupils from the primary school visited the comprehensive school and undertook some of their timetable there. This helped with their transition with less disruption experienced in the new term. This was also an initiative that OFSTED was impressed with. It was also advised that the Council has a good collaborative relationship with Academies and there are no instances of them not working with us.

- (vi) What support is given to pupils at secondary school who have received a poor education at primary school?

The committee was advised that secondary schools look back at key stage 1 data to consider what pupils should be on target to achieve at key stage 4, therefore not just taking consideration of the most recent results. Using this information they implement targeted interventions, for example where pupils may have gaps in literacy and numeracy.

- (vii) How are schools being supporting and challenged to implement new curriculums, particularly when performance benchmarks are not clear?

It was explained that school improvement at the Council is changing and their role moving forwards is going to be more about undertaking an overall quality check of performance. The Council will have an Alliance Board with representatives attending from the Council, Schools and other partners. Stakeholders will be able to ask for help from the board and the Council will then challenge the impact of the intervention. Increasingly, work will be sector led, not by the Council.

- (viii) What happens to children that are not attending school and what is being done to re-engage them?

It was advised that 'Barnsley Challenge' is trying to raise attendance at school as every day lost is not good for pupils. There has been a focus in the last 12 months to work with the education welfare service to address this and in 2013/14 attendance rose by 1.4%. Schools have their own systems to track and deal with poor attendance, for example meeting with families. Co-ordinated support is also provided from the stronger families team.

There are a few cases of very poor attendance and this is known to us and is being dealt with. Recently a review was done on children on part-time timetables. When the cases were looked into, it was found that for each child

there was an individual story regarding their personal circumstances and why they had disengaged from learning. Therefore, a part-time timetable was part of the process of gradually introducing them to education and building their resilience to be able to spend a full day in school and make sure they are not disrupting others.

- (ix) Can you influence the spending of the Pupil Premium and do you have access to every school that has Looked After Children?

It was highlighted that in terms of the pupil premium, Barnsley is not doing well as we were meeting the national average but we want to do better. However this year, the gap has widened even though our progress has improved. In September a pupil premium conference was held which a number of people attended, therefore everyone is now clear what should be being done. Our primary schools have also pulled together a toolkit on how to spend pupil premium grants.

The Council has no say over the spend of pupil premium grants however can influence and challenge the decisions. Where there are large numbers of pupil premium grants within a school performance tends to be better in terms of results, as the combined resource is able to have more impact.

In terms of Looked After Children, we always get termly data regarding the progress of these pupils. Since April 2014 pupil premium grants for Looked After Children are now managed by the 'Virtual School' at the Council. Each school has to submit plans in relation to the spend, which have to be agreed by the Virtual School. During this process challenge has taken place in relation to plans, hence we are still working to resolve some of them.

- (x) In 2013, 18 primary schools didn't meet the national floor targets, however this has now reduced to 10. Are we likely to see any further reductions and is the good practice being shared?

The theme in the responses was highlighted, that we are working together to raise aspirations and help pupils achieve the progress they should, thereby raising our attainment in the Borough and making continuous improvements in schools. There is good collaboration and sharing of data and resources at a secondary level, however we need to increase this at our primary schools.

When you consider the data as a percentage, 50% of primary schools are not meeting the standard, this is not good enough and we need to make progress. It is recognised however that we are making improvements and we are starting to see the results. It is also challenging to make improvements when changes keep being made to funding and guidelines.

We are getting better at assessing our performance and what we need to do to improve it which is evident in our results. However we still need to do more and accelerate the pace.

- (xi) Are our Looked After Children making expected progress and if not what are we doing to improve this?

It was advised that progress of Looked After Children in our primary schools is in-line with schools nationally and we want to achieve this at the secondary level also. To address this, we are working with schools to negotiate the spend of pupil premium grants to ensure this is being done on a personal basis. Poor progress in attainment is seen where children have had disruption either in their personal or school life. It is more difficult to get a settled placement for secondary school aged children, however we are working hard to try and get consistency in these children's lives.

We have teachers who have specifically been employed to work with Looked After Children on English and Maths. Progress was made with English; however the same progress was not shown in the Maths results. This is likely to be as a result of the design of the different curriculums and highlights the importance of pupils regularly attending school so they don't have gaps in their learning.

(xii) To what extent have exam results in Barnsley been challenged to exam boards and changes made to the outcomes?

It was explained that this has affected all of our schools, a number of papers have been sent for re-marking due to the way the guidelines have changed. This has resulted in a significant improvement in grades for some of our schools. The data will be validated in January 2015 and we are confident that our outcomes should be even better than is currently reported.

(xiii) How has the delay on results being returned following re-marks impacted on our pupils?

It was advised that we have not been made aware of any particular problems. Due to the changes it has been noted that universities are being flexible in their response and have had discussions on estimated grades with teachers and have held places for pupils.

(xiv) There is a gap in attainment regarding pupils receiving free school meals however this has been closed at some schools, therefore what is being done to address this?

It was highlighted that we are continuing to encourage the sharing of good practice in schools and are also undertaking a Pupil Premium Audit.

(xv) A number of pupils from Penistone have gone to Oxbridge, what are the barriers to pupils e.g. from the Dearne going?

It was explained that this can be for a number of reasons, including standards in education as well as the individual's belief in achievement. To attend Oxbridge pupils have to be well-rounded and emotionally resilient in addition to exceptional academic attainment. We are trying to encourage mentorship with business to help pupils to be equipped with these skills and confidence.

It was noted that it is important to have a dialogue between schools and parents regarding encouraging pupil progress and the value of education. Therefore schools are working hard to engage with families to make them aware of what can be achieved. Nationally there has been a reduction in the number of people going to university from families with lower incomes; however Barnsley is currently bucking this trend.

It was also noted that young people need to feel they have a choice regarding their future as university is not the best route for everyone. Barnsley's 'I Know I Can' programme is important in looking at achievement and the choices available to make young people aware of the options available to them.

(xvi) In 2014 the gap widened for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) but with no statement, what are the reasons for this?

It was advised that the widening gap is a reflection in the turbulence regarding the quality of teaching and being able to tailor interventions to meet individual pupils' needs. Teachers are becoming better at understanding this; however cases are also increasingly complex. Since April 2014, Inclusion Services have combined with the School Improvement Team to look at the resources available and better target them. Support is also required to Secondary school as children are seeing a number of different teachers in a day rather than being based with one, therefore more support is being targeted in this area and we should see a reduction in the gap next time.

(xvii) When children with learning disabilities are based within a school does this affect the overall results?

The committee was informed that in terms of educational attainment all data is grouped together, therefore where there is low performance this will be reflected in the results. However our key focus is looking at progress and whether pupils have made the same improvement as their peers. In Barnsley our figures are likely to be under the national averages as we have catching up to do, but our rates of progress are better than national figures.

It was also noted that it is important to look at progress as well as attainment otherwise you may get 'coasting' schools where their pupils attain the expected levels but if they were pushed then they would be able to achieve much more. When progress rates are considered this means that changes can be focused on all pupils and not just those would attain nationally expected levels with support. It is therefore important to get underneath figures, understand what they are telling you rather than taking them at face value and encourage others to do this also.

(xviii) Is there an impact on our schools in relation to the number of learners where English is an additional language?

It was highlighted that within Town Centre schools there is an increased incidence of learners where English is an additional language. For previous academic years, progress for these pupils has been in line with national

figures; however this is an increasing demand and challenge for our schools. Previously we did not get much support however we now have school forum funding to develop practice in this area for children and their families at both primary and secondary schools.

Schools have also set up Service Level Agreements with other areas where there are large numbers of pupils where English is an additional language, for example in Leeds and Bradford. Best practice is being shared via online courses as well as open house sessions where schools can learn from others. Work is being done therefore to increase sustainability and capacity across the Borough in relation to this. There is also a focus in some of our schools to ensure good modelling of the English language for those where English is their first language.

The Chair thanked the witnesses for attending and the information they had provided.

6. CSSC Review of 2013/14 and Plans for 2014/15 Report

The Chair presented the draft report which reviews the work of the CSSC and outlines the plans for the future, asking members for any comments regarding the report and if they approved the content.

Members of the CSSC agreed that it would be good for a few more Members to be on the committee and agreed for the report to be taken to Cabinet.

ACTIONS:

- 1) Figures to be provided as numbers as well as percentages in reports.
- 2) CSSC to monitor educational attainment and progress figures as well as the performance of other initiatives taking place to improve the attainment of all pupils in the Borough.
- 3) All members of the CSSC to encourage the careful interpretation of data and information in relation to educational performance, particularly in terms of pupil progress rather than just focusing on attainment figures.