

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Tuesday, 1 December 2015
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis (Chair), P. Birkinshaw, G. Carr, Franklin, Frost, Hand-Davis, Johnson, Pourali, Sheard, Tattersall and Unsworth together with co-opted members Ms P. Gould, Ms J. Whittaker and Mr J. Winter

18 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Kate Morritt in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

19 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

There were declarations of interest from Councillors Carr, Tattersall and Unsworth as Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Virtual School Governance Group. Councillor Frost declared an interest as a member of the NUT (National Union of Teachers).

20 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Councillor Unsworth advised Berneslai Homes responded to his request regarding legionella and was reassured the systems are heated sufficiently twice per week to kill the Legionella bacteria.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th October 2015 were approved as a true and accurate record.

21 Barnsley Provisional Education Outcomes 2015

The Chair welcomed the witnesses to the meeting which included:

- Nick Bowen, Principal of Horizon Community College and Joint Chair of Barnsley Schools' Alliance Board
- Yvonne Gray, Headteacher of Cudworth Churchfield Primary School and Joint Chair of Barnsley Schools' Alliance Board
- Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director, People Directorate
- Margaret Libreri, Service Director, Education, Early Start and Prevention, People Directorate
- Catherine Kelly, Head of Barnsley Schools' Alliance, People Directorate
- Councillor Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Member, People (Achieving Potential)

Margaret Libreri gave an introduction to the reports, highlighting for 5 year olds the gap between Barnsley children's GLD (Good Level of Development) has narrowed compared with national results, however a priority for the service is to reduce the gap with the national results for disadvantaged children.

Following the assessment of 7 year olds in reading, writing and mathematics, as the results have improved by the same margin as those nationally, Barnsley has been unable to narrow the gap between its neighbouring authorities or the national figure.

The results for 11 year olds in reading, writing and mathematics have been very good as pupils in Barnsley have improved at a faster rate than those nationally, which has helped to reduce the gap to 1% point.

There has also been improvement in the GCSE qualifications which is seen as a priority; provisional results for 2015 show 49.5% of students achieved 5A*- C, including both English and Maths. Following the results being validated the final figure should be 50%; the service believes this is a reason to celebrate however, is more ambitious than this and wants to see even better results.

Members proceeded to ask the following questions:

- I. What are the current challenges, specifically due to the shortage of teachers and also absences due to stress? Are there shortages of teachers for particular subjects?

The committee were advised the three main subjects where there is the greatest difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified teachers is in English, Maths and Science, with Science now being the most difficult, which can result in pupils not always being taught at the level that is aspired to.

There is a continual drive for improvement in the standard of teaching that is being delivered and to address this, the Barnsley Schools' Alliance Board has established 5 working groups. These include Teaching and Learning, Behaviour and Attendance, Closing the Gap, Improving Leadership Capacity and Raising Attainment and Achievement. One of the groups is currently developing a protocol considering what will attract teachers in these areas.

Due to the inherent difficulty in recruiting teachers in English, Maths and Science, incentives such as 'golden handshakes' and the use of recruitment agencies is required, however these incur additional financial costs.

Further difficulties are caused by Barnsley being the lowest funded in terms of secondary schools; by comparison the neighbouring authority of Rotherham receives an additional £1400 per child, which can equate to a further £1.4m in a school of 10,000 pupils. Whilst the financial situation is not the only criteria that can determine the standard of education being taught, it does mean Barnsley schools are unable to compete with the same level of resources.

II. Will the funding formula regarding the Autumn Statement help at all?

The committee were advised that a national funding formula regarding schools would help, however this is likely to lose votes, therefore is unlikely to be put in place.

III. In terms of teachers being stressed, are we helping with endless observations and criticisms? Also, do we pair outstanding teachers with others so they can learn from good practice?

The group were informed within the last three years the secondary schools in Barnsley have made considerable progress with the affiliated unions, resulting in a productive working relationship. This has helped in providing support to teachers, including those suffering with stress.

Schools have been supporting teachers by pairing them with more experienced staff, who help them learn and develop. Also, through this, there are examples when a teacher will recognise it is not the career for them.

IV. What is in place to ensure schools operate effectively within the local community such as engagement with local Councillors, and how can we take this forward?

The group were advised that Barnsley schools are developing plans to work with Area Councils to help resolve the challenges that are being faced as well as working more closely with Members in how they can be mutually supportive. This work is planned to take place in the New Year.

As schools transfer to being academies across the country, this has led to them not working together as closely, which has then impacted on the sharing of knowledge and ideas. In Barnsley however, this has not been the case and there is good networking across schools and you can't tell whether they are academies, trusts or local authority (LA) run. In Barnsley each school is RAG (Red, Amber or Green) rated by the Barnsley Alliance and we contact them to have a conversation about their performance. All schools have engaged with this process and some schools are now asking if they can pay for further support.

V. How does the funding of schools in Barnsley compare, considering there are areas of the borough that are less deprived than others, such as Penistone?

The Members were advised the funding for secondary schools in Barnsley is the lowest in the country; however, this is not the same for primary schools. Any change to the ratio between the two would have financial implications. The Barnsley Schools' Forum looked into reviewing the Schools' Funding Formula to redress the balance for secondary schools but it was considered this would then leave the primary schools as being financially vulnerable.

The funding Barnsley schools receive is further compounded as deprivation between advantaged and disadvantaged students is wider than the national figure, therefore we don't want to change the funding formula. The service acknowledged funding is

tight for certain schools, such as Penistone Grammar and therefore a meeting will shortly take place with the school governors as to how we can support the school.

- VI. What is being done to improve the Key Stage 4 (GCSE) results to further reduce the gap to the national average?

The committee were advised through the Barnsley Schools' Alliance this has helped in identifying any under achieving schools particularly through the fortnightly meetings that are held with the secondary school head teachers. Through the continual challenge taking place at these meetings, this has benefited the under performing schools in providing them with the support that is required.

Also, a few years ago there was an entrenched culture of under-achievement in secondary schools, however the new head teachers have changed this and welcome real challenge. Through the impetus of the Barnsley Schools' Alliance, they have been able to challenge this behaviour which has subsequently seen improvements in the exam results of schools. Although there has not been a considerable improvement in the Key Stage 4 (GCSE) results, this should change following the current practices that have been implemented.

- VII. Uptake of the Pupil Premium Grant is poor in Barnsley; are we contacting parents regarding taking this up which would help with school funding as well as ensuring children have a good meal?

The group were advised there are universal infant free school meals and it is recognised that for some pupils this will be their most nutritious meal of the day. However, in some cases this has back-fired for schools as if parents don't make them aware they are in receipt of benefits then the school are unable to claim any additional funds.

- VIII. Considering the difference between schools, what is being done to increase resources as well as share skills and experience?

The committee were advised there has been a new approach to both intervention and the challenge and support being provided. In August we analysed all the data, which was then incorporated within a RAG rating for each primary, secondary and academy school. We also want to identify the green rated schools so we can share their good practice with others.

For red-rated primary schools, two LA School Evaluation Officers have gone out to them and asked what their barriers are to improvement. For red-rated secondary schools, Nick Bowen and Catherine Kelly have undertaken visits to identify barriers. Action plans are then developed as well as utilising an intervention fund, which the Barnsley Schools' Alliance will then hold the school to account against. Where a school has been rated as either red or amber for some time, their performance will be reviewed every 4-6 weeks. Where improvements are still not made, the LA will issue a warning notice.

We have also looked at global problems such as poor Maths performance, for which we have brokered external support.

It is evident in Barnsley that four of the higher attaining schools are also the four lowest funded schools. Therefore it often comes back to the quality of leadership and teaching. It is also noted that Barnsley has a disproportionate amount of pupils with challenging behaviour and we need to continue to increase aspirations.

Secondary schools are sharing resources, including expertise, which is shared with schools whether they are academies, trusts or community schools.

IX. How can we get other schools to undertake the same good practice engagement Horizon school has undertaken with families facing barriers?

The group were advised as Horizon Community College is a town centre school they have a more diverse population, therefore do a lot of work in relation to engagement. As a group of head teachers we meet regularly and have a slot on our meetings and look at our communities. We also have the IKIC (I Know I Can) Programme as a regular agenda item as we're not exam factories and the more you engage with families, the more likely children are to learn.

X. What provision is made for cultural differences in communities within schools?

Members were advised Barnsley is seeing an increase in the number of EAL (English as an Additional Language) students. Horizon Community College is able to provide holistic support to other schools, sharing their expertise in meeting both cultural and educational needs such as enabling these families to engage with the education system.

EAL students are encouraged to engage in the full range of activities the school offers and not just focus on their academic achievements. Improvement has been seen with the GCSE results of EAL students, which shows that the engagement is having a positive impact.

XI. There is an acknowledged difference in the results achieved by girls and boys, what is being done to address this?

The group were advised this is a national issue, with data analysis being able to support it. To help to try and address this, each of the Barnsley Schools' Alliance 5 working groups consider this in their work.

The Teaching and Learning Group is currently developing protocols regarding what makes outstanding teaching and learning and how this will impact on boys and girls. For example, if certain changes are made, we could find that girls do even better and the gap widens further.

The Key Stage 1 assessments illustrate from an early age how girls' attainment is better than boys, with research identifying that boys' physical development is slower, therefore we need to focus on improving this in boys.

The London Challenge identified that 'white working class boys' are the hardest demographic category to change in relation to academic performance, which is the largest demographic in our schools. Therefore this creates particular difficulty in Barnsley regarding improving educational attainment.

To further illustrate this, had the boys achieved as well as the girls had done with their GCSE examinations two years ago, then the overall results at Horizon Community College would have been classed as 'outstanding'.

XII. How well did the 12 month project work at Penistone School that adopted a new way of teaching maths, and have the teachers who were involved been retained?

The group were advised this information will need to be clarified and will then be reported back to the committee.

XIII. What support is being given to families in deprived areas in helping to instil the value of their child's education, whilst ensuring they are actively involved in helping their child, such as assisting with homework?

The committee was advised Parent Support Workers have been employed to help parents who do not actively engage in their child's education; this has helped identifying in some cases the parents themselves are unable to read or write. Therefore, this means they are then unable to help their children with their homework.

We run homework clubs, breakfast clubs and adult learning groups in schools to try to get parents to work alongside their child. Many parents however find it difficult to admit that they are struggling. We also have open evenings for parents, where the teaching techniques that are used today are explained, such as those for phonics and maths.

There are some families where their child's education is not valued, which makes progress in education difficult. In some cases schools try to engage parents with the voluntary sector to provide additional support.

XIV. There are some families where children are not getting support, e.g. in relation to practicing spellings which will mean they fall behind. Some parents say they don't want support, however how are we ensuring this takes place?

The group were advised, through the continual challenge undertaken by the Barnsley Schools' Alliance these children are unable to be ignored by their school and extra resources such as reading champions are being employed. We also have arrangements for older children to read with younger ones.

Members were advised that schools recognise and welcome the active role that grandparents are now playing, often acting as surrogate parents when the child's parents are working full time.

Currently there is a pilot scheme that is looking at schools in Sheffield, Doncaster and Blackpool, with the objection of how the school can then successfully engage with the hardest to reach families. Dave Whittaker who is Chair of the Behaviour and Attendance group is going to consider this alongside Catherine Kelly and whether this can then be piloted in Barnsley.

- XV. Due to a number of parents being on low wages and therefore working long hours, grandparents often operate in the parental role; does this affect the school's engagement with its children?

The committee were advised they could not speak for all schools, but for the ones they represented they welcome anyone to help, for example Aunts and Uncles. The school's main concern is for those children where there is no engagement with the child's education.

At this point in the meeting, an elected member highlighted that due to an investigation they had been part of in considering educational attainment, that the best system was in Finland where children aren't formally educated till age 7. In this country there is no parental choice so all children have to go to their local school till age 16 and the schools are attached to health centres and old peoples' homes where all those in the building meet together and eat so you get all ages mixing together. Also, no formal testing is undertaken till age 16.

- XVI. As it is not compulsory for schools to join the Barnsley Alliance, how do you ensure they engage with the work?

The Members were advised the board needs to be the 'best club in town' so schools want to join it, and making it so it's almost impossible not to be part of it. The LA still has powers to challenge e.g. academy sponsors if they are not engaging. The strength from the Alliance is that it is peer to peer support and challenge, therefore can't be ignored. When we have written to our academies with challenge, they have welcomed this and see themselves as responsible for Barnsley's young people.

It was highlighted to the group how the role of school improvement had moved from the LA to schools and how the offer of the Barnsley Alliance was effective in this. Also that this sector-led approach to improvement was not yet producing the progress wanted but that it is going in the right direction.

It was also highlighted to Members that the exam results have continued improving over the last 5 years and we have gained 5% on the national average. The LA's relationship with schools is unrecognisable compared with 5/10 years ago; therefore Elected Members also need to re-define their role as community leaders and representatives.

Members were advised of an all-member information brief scheduled for early 2016 on the Barnsley Alliance which they were encouraged to attend.

XVII. Are the numbers of pupils in classes being kept to a manageable size to ensure their academic improvement is not being affected?

The group was advised in secondary schools class sizes are all under 30, however primary schools are struggling as numbers are increasing. Schools are being innovative in utilising adults and identifying empty spaces that can be adapted to use as classrooms which is helping to keep class sizes down.

Ideally primary schools would not want to see their class sizes being over 30 and aim to keep the number of pupils between 25 and 30. Although, in situations where a child has won an appeal to attend the school, the school will then have to accept the child which can lead to larger class sizes.

XVIII. Has there been an increase in the number of vertically grouped classes where children are from different age ranges?

The committee was advised there had been no increase in the number of these types of classes.

The Chair encouraged Members to attend a training session on Managing Skills and Development being held on the 8th December 2015 or 12th January 2016, thanked the witnesses and all attendees for their contribution, and declared the meeting closed.

Action Points

- 1) Service to confirm how well the 12 month project at Penistone school regarding maths teaching had gone and whether the teachers have been retained from this programme.
- 2) Members to attend the all-member information briefing on the Barnsley Alliance once a date is scheduled.
- 3) Members to attend the training session on Managing Skills and Development on either 8th December 2015 or 12th January 2016 and let Lesley Glanville know (lesleyglanville@barnsley.gov.uk or 01226 773078).