

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Tuesday, 29 January 2019
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, G. Carr, Clements, Frost, Gollick, Daniel Griffin, Hayward, Makinson, Mitchell, Phillips, Pickering, Pourali, Sheard, Tattersall, Williams, Wilson and Wright together with co-opted member Ms K. Morritt

46 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

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

47 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

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

48 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th January 2019 were approved as a true and accurate record subject to a minor amendment to minute 44 to reflect that the service will provide information about how parents whose children are subject to exclusions are supported to challenge exclusions.

49 Provisional Education Outcomes for Children & Young People in Barnsley 2018

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Nick Bowen, Principal of Horizon Community College and Joint Chair of Barnsley Schools' Alliance Board

Margaret Libreri, Service Director, Education, Early Start and Prevention, People Directorate, BMBC

Richard Lynch, Head of Barnsley Schools' Alliance, People Directorate, BMBC

Liz Gibson, Virtual School Headteacher for Looked After Children (LAC), People Directorate, BMBC

Councillor Sarah Tattersall, Cabinet Support Member for People (Achieving Potential)

The Service Director introduced this item, explaining that the report outlines the validated education outcomes for children and young people in Barnsley, broken down by pupil group, from assessments taken in 2018. The report provides an overview from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (age 4/5) to Key Stage (KS) 5 (A-Level), including comparisons where possible, together with an initial picture of the statutory outcomes for 2018 of children placed in Barnsley's Corporate Care and

featured in the Statistical First Release (SFR) cohort for the academic year September 2017 to July 2018.

In the ensuing discussion, and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:

Members were reassured that subjects such as arts, languages and practical skills were not neglected at the expense of more academic subjects in order to meet Key Stage outcomes, although this may have happened in the past. Schools now do much more in terms of getting young people ready for life and the world of work and are actively exploring a much more diverse curriculum, with schools open into the evening. Holocaust Memorial Day was recently commemorated at Horizon in the evening and the event was open to all. There is now more focus on inclusion and a more diverse curriculum, particularly for children with special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding. Primary schools in Barnsley focus on a broad and balanced curriculum and are particularly adept at taking up the rich cultural offer which Barnsley has to offer.

It was explained that changes to the Ofsted framework have helped in this area, with initiatives such as Progress 8 and Attainment 8 leading to a broader, more balanced curriculum, encompassing diversity in languages, arts, dance, drama and photography, to name but a few. It was highlighted that there is currently a push to increase the uptake of languages in Barnsley. Horizon is performing at above the national average in languages at 50% (the national average is 30%). Members agreed that education is a question of getting the balance right but that it seems the new framework is moving in the right direction.

It was felt that the 2.5 School Improvement Officer and Evaluation Officer posts are adequate to actively support schools to improve when coupled with Head teachers from across Barnsley who meet every month to support and challenge each other and to share best practice.

Looked after children can now access an enhanced educational package, with wider opportunities available through effective use of pupil premium funding and a more personalised 'package'. Schools receive £500 per child per term but this is not a personal budget and schools can decide for themselves how this should be spent, although the spending has to be evaluated in terms of effectiveness. Schools are also able to apply for additional funds.

The system for parents to take their children out of school on holiday was explained. Schools have to report such absences and parents are fined £60 per child, which comes back in to the service.

A Member reported that teacher sickness absence at Burton Road school had been much improved when teachers had been for a flu jab. This was also the case at Horizon.

A discussion took place around elective home education (EHE). There are a significant number of cases in Barnsley but there is no requirement placed on schools or the Education Authority to monitor these children, although the Education Welfare Service works with parents.

It was acknowledged that Barnsley's fixed term exclusion figures are high. In comparison to other South Yorkshire Authorities, Barnsley had the highest figure in terms of the average number of days lost per excluded pupil in 2017 and the greatest increase from 2016. The average number of days lost is above the England average and the increase is significantly higher than national and regional figures. The permanent exclusion rate for secondary schools in Barnsley increased again in 2017, with a greater increase than that seen nationally. Data suggests that off-rolling does not occur in Barnsley and any exclusions have to be properly documented.

Just two schools in Barnsley are responsible for the majority of exclusions and a lot of work is being done around behaviour and sanctions policies to bring this figure down. Sanctions should be used proportionately and this is now being done, with a greater emphasis on inclusion. Years 7 and 8 are proving to be the most challenging age groups. Schools do a lot of work with very difficult and challenging children. Exclusion is used as a last resort in cases of extreme behaviour.

Members expressed concern about the use of isolation units or 'internal' exclusion. It was reported that this is often done as a sanction to reintegrate the more challenging pupils and can lead to a reduction in the number of exclusions.

Children and young people are separated from their peers, don't go to lunch with friends etc. and this is proving to be effective. It was acknowledged that parents are made aware, in writing, of fixed term exclusions but are not informed of internal exclusions. In some cases the children and young people do not want parents to be aware of this. Schools keep a record of isolation information but this is not shared at a Local Authority level as schools have a degree of autonomy. Any request for this information would have to go through the Governing Body. Similarly, detention has been used as a sanction for a long time but the figures aren't published. More challenging pupils have to be removed from the classroom from time to time as their behaviour impacts on other pupils in the class who are wanting to learn.

Although schools do not publish this information, parents are able to ask for a meeting with the school if their child has had a lot of sanctions and to discuss a way forward. A Member felt that many excluded pupils may have a special educational need, with underlying issues, and it is crucial that sanctions are applied appropriately. Sanctions vary by school.

The practice of 'off-rolling' was discussed and Members were reassured that this does not happen in Barnsley and that the rise in children educated at home was not due to this practice. The rise may be due to a number of factors, including that when children experience problems at a school, parents often decide to withdraw them from school or transfer schools to avoid confrontation with the school. Lots of advice about home education can be found on social media, which is worrying, as it is not suitable for all children and may lead to a poor educational experience.

The Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) system was explained. This works more effectively than in the past, where children were placed on long waiting lists for assessment. Children are now assessed by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, which leads to a speedier diagnosis. The number of children with special educational needs has increased but there are now fewer identified in early years, with a spike in primary school. Schools are now better informed around behaviours and are better equipped to respond than in the past. Schools are more

proficient at requesting assessments, which may also explain the increase, as more plans are issued than in neighbouring authorities.

That said, there is still a huge amount of work to do for children on the Autistic spectrum, coupled with a need to increase parental confidence that mainstream schools can meet the needs of their children. Currently 72% of plans are issued within the agreed timeframe, which is a vast improvement as the percentage previously was 14%, rising to 50% before reaching current levels. An assessment takes place within 6 weeks, with 20 weeks to complete the plan. Performance is good by comparison to statistical neighbours. The quality of the parental experience is being looked at and steps are taken to ensure that the voice of the child is heard.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution
- (ii) The report be noted, and
- (iii) Enquiries be made as to the feasibility of schools sharing information with this committee regarding their use of isolation units within school