

EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Education Advisory Board held remotely on Wednesday, 14 July 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Ryan Brent
Terry Norton
Jeanette Smith
Judith Smyth

Apologies for Absence

7. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Helen Reeder, Teacher Liaison Panel and Alison Jeffery, who both had other meetings. The Chair welcomed Councillor Brent, the new Chair of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel, and Frances Soul, the newly appointed chair of the Portsmouth Education Partnership (PEP).

8. Declarations of interests

Councillor Horton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as she is Vice-Chair of the governing body at Craneswater Junior School. Councillor Brent declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as he works at the City of Portsmouth College (to be created from a merger between Highbury College and Portsmouth College). Councillor Norton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as he is employed at Mayfield School through an external agency. Councillor Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as she works for Hampshire branch of Unison and is a trustee of Portsmouth College.

Mike Stoneman declared an interest as he is a trustee of UTC Portsmouth. Debbie Anderson declared an interest as she sometimes works as an Ofsted inspector. Frances Soul declared an interest as she is a trustee of Coram Life Education, a trustee of the Future Frontiers careers charity and a consultant for the Confederation of School Trusts.

9. Minutes of previous meeting held on 8 February 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2021 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

10. Update on inspections

Before moving to the first agenda item Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Children, Families & Education, gave an update on recent Ofsted inspections.

The UTC (University Technical College) Portsmouth had had a Section 8 inspection which turned into a two day Section 5 inspection when it became clear substantial progress had been made, and that safeguarding was now effective. The UTC is now Outstanding across all judgement areas. Staff have been informed and the outcome has been published on the Ofsted website.

Just under 92% (91.7%) Portsmouth schools are Good or Outstanding and 93.4% children attend them. Wimborne Primary is excluded from these figures as it is a new school created from the amalgamation of Wimborne Infant and Wimborne Junior Schools, both of which were both Good prior to the amalgamation. Four schools Require Improvement (Castle View Academy, Stamshaw Junior, Milton Park Primary, Westover Primary) and Corpus Christi Catholic Primary is Inadequate because of safeguarding concerns, which in turn means leadership is inadequate. It is hoped at the next Section 8 inspection the outcome will improve as was the case at UTC Portsmouth. Officers are satisfied that safeguarding is now effective. When schools are judged Inadequate they are issued with an Academy Order by the RSC. As a result Corpus Christi has become part of the Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust (Oaklands School). However, the council still works closely with Corpus Christi. Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement & Early Years, has worked with the new headteacher, who was appointed last September, and has visited regularly. Participation in the Destination Reader programme and the use of systematic synthetic phonics have helped improve literacy at KS2. Ofsted monitoring visits in the autumn and spring were positive.

In response to questions from members about the Portsmouth Paradox (where despite schools having good Ofsted outcomes attainment and progress remains relatively low), officers explained there is no easy answer and attainment and progress still need to improve. Poor school attendance remains a significant factor, particularly at secondary level. There is also a high rate of fixed-term exclusions. There were a number of schools in difficult circumstances some years ago (most of which are now academies) and although they are moving in the right direction improvements are gradual. It takes time to improve a failing school. There are significant variations across Portsmouth; some schools improve but then have a difficult cohort which leads to turbulence. Officers are optimistic that the implementation of the priorities that make up the Portsmouth Education Strategy will lead to further improvements. The proof of this will not be available until next year (2022) when the first set of results since the pandemic will be published.

It was noted that two-thirds of schools belong to 14 Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), which the RSC holds accountable for improving standards. The council works with the remaining third of LA maintained schools and focuses on those who need additional help.

In response to concerns that the 2020 and 2021 results would be inflated or inconsistent, officers said they would examine the 2022 results carefully. They are not taking their foot off the pedal when it comes to improving standards and recently requested a meeting with the Schools Minister Nick Gibb to discuss the issue and the paradox described above. They acknowledged that

some areas with higher levels of deprivation achieve better results but some like London receive significantly more funding per pupil. Areas like Hastings and Medway have results very similar to Portsmouth, especially for white British boys, whose low attainment is a national issue.

11. Response to Covid-19

Mike Stoneman presented the report and highlighted the support provided since schools re-opened on 8 March, including the Studybugs initiative which is providing live attendance data. He noted that vouchers for free school meals pupils (provided by EdenRed) would be available for the whole of the summer holidays, including for eligible early years pupils.

Sarah Christopher, PEP and School Inclusion Manager, gave an update on anti-racism work and mental health support. Although there is no requirement for schools to report prejudice-based incidents, headteachers are asked to provide information so that officers can track and monitor and provide appropriate education and training. Most incidents are race related with a few related to gender or sexual orientation. Sarah reported that children did some fabulous work for the UN Anti-Racism Day on 20 March, including a display of art work at Canoe Lake. A working group is co-producing work on nuanced conversations (those where even if there is not a racist intent it impacts the recipient). It is matter of educating people who make such remarks that they are not appropriate. One teacher has done good work on challenging stereotypes from a young age. Some schools have requested whole staff training which is linked to other work such as the Portsmouth Black History project.

It is unlikely other areas have the full mental health support that Portsmouth does. Despite delays caused by Covid relationships are being built with the Mental Health Support Teams. Co-production is taking place with parents to unpick pathways for mental health support as they can be confusing. Support can come from Kooth or the Mental Health Support Teams as well as CAMHS.

Absence due to children having to self-isolate has increased recently so remote education is still essential and will continue next year. TSAT (Thinking Schools Academy Trust) have supported schools with their digital learning offer under a contract with the council and officers have increased the number of children having access to a device and the internet. Details of the digital learning strategy were announced at the PEP summer conference on 2 July.

In response to questions from members, officers explained that

Uptake for vouchers for free school meal pupils was around 98%. Schools give parents the code to access the vouchers.

The laptops promised by the government have been received.

Anti-racism training is provided as soon as schools request it. A package around anti-racism has been compiled as a result of requests. When the

guidance is launched in September schools will be encouraged to base training around it. However, training is just one aspect of changing a school's culture.

Many events like assemblies have moved online, for example, there was online assembly with an LGBT theme for primary schools, which could be shared with other schools. It is hoped to continue online training events along with face-to-face ones. Training includes dealing with scenarios when very young children repeat parents' views without being disrespectful to the parents. There is a specialist team in early help who do a lot of work and training with schools.

The CAMHS waiting list varies according to the help needed; for example, it can be long for autism but responds very quickly to young people in crisis. CAMHS can offer consultation, support and advice while waiting and families can phone for advice. Waiting lists are longer because of increased demand rather than under-resourcing. There are also problems filling staff vacancies as recruitment to CAMHS posts is an issue regionally.

With regard to monitoring the outcomes of initiatives, attainment will not be known until next year but exclusion and attendance are still monitored. Vulnerable learners are tracked and, if not in school, are supported. Portsmouth currently has better rates of school attendance than other local authorities. Officers are now working on reducing fixed-term exclusions which will impact on attainment. The Chair said "big picture" factors are complex but officers can drill down to tangible results in some interventions such as Pompey Pirates. Members thought it would be helpful to see at the next meeting a brief table showing the effectiveness of initiatives and interventions.

Mike Stoneman confirmed that data could be provided by year group on those children that have had to self-isolate due to a positive case in school. The situation has been challenging in the last few weeks and is becoming more so as the end of term approaches. Schools have provided a good offer and access to devices so it would be disappointing if children and families were not engaging with school.

RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note the actions that have been taken over the past sixteen months by the council and partners to respond to the pandemic and the ongoing work that is in place in order to continue to support education settings.

12. Portsmouth Education Strategy 2020-2023: Refresh for Year 2

Mike Stoneman and Debbie Anderson presented the report, highlighting the Portsmouth Education Strategy's four key areas which would be the focus of Year 2.

Digital learning - officers will continue to work to reap the benefits of progress made during Covid; schools are now in a much better position to support digital learning. At the PEP summer conference TSAT set out a digital learning vision with a number of themes for the autumn term, for example,

reducing digital poverty by ensuring good access to the internet at school and home.

Peer review - Portsmouth is highly collaborative but can be inward-looking so the new peer review framework will be non-judgemental and focus on lines of enquiry such as how school improvement plans are working and how they can work better. A process has been written with LA maintained schools who do not have the access to peer review that academies have and which can be costly for smaller schools. Peer review teams will comprise different schools who can learn from each other. All schools have signed up to the process. A second PEP process encourages LA maintained schools and MATs to benefit from each other's expertise. The aim is to look outwards while using the best of what is available in Portsmouth.

Improving literacy outcomes - KS2 outcomes are still a concern though the Maths Hub has helped improve maths. The Early Language & Literacy Development Group is for all years, not just early years. The "plan on a page" has been refreshed to become a "commitment" with strands of expectations showing what families, the local authority, culture and leisure organisations are meant to be doing to improve early language and literacy. There is a particular focus on reading. Portsmouth is twinned with the Hastings Opportunity Area and as part of their funding Hastings has to assist other areas so Portsmouth benefits from Hastings' use of Hackney Learning Trust's Destination Reader programme. It is used in ten schools and has shown to be really effective - a 'game changer' for some. It comprises high quality teaching of reading and oracy and encourages a love of reading using high quality texts. Portsmouth's report on progress to Hastings can be brought to the next meeting. The twinning arrangement with Hastings will continue next year so another ten schools at KS2 can join. The Hackney Learning Trust have not used Destination Reader in secondary schools but they are willing to adapt it for Year 7 in Portsmouth schools. The aim is that all subject teachers are also teachers of reading as children need to read well to do well in the subject. Two secondary schools have expressed interest in being a pilot. Portsmouth's approach to reading is on the PEP website and is a useful source of information.

In response to questions from members, there are termly monitoring reports for Destination Reader which members can see if they wish. Attainment information is available for the Pompey Pirates reading scheme for up to April 2021; the average improvement in reading age was 11 months and 35% children improved their reading age by a year or more. Members thought successes should be widely publicised and be part of future reports to the Board.

Portsmouth is looking to expand Pompey Pirates to three literacy hubs across the city so more schools can benefit. Officers are currently looking at sites in north and central Portsmouth. The Chair encouraged people to volunteer with Pompey Pirates, having found it a very rewarding experience.

Attendance and fixed-term exclusions (FTE) - there is concern with statistical neighbours and disappointingly FTEs are rising. Great work is being done with

restorative practice. Claire Copeland of Trafalgar School has significantly reduced FTEs with restorative practice at the heart of work. FTE figures rise where there is a more punitive approach. Collective efforts to address similar issues have resulted in change. Portsmouth was at the bottom for permanent exclusions but is now in the top ten, likewise with electively home educated children; there is no evidence of any off-rolling now. Mark Finnis, a guest speaker at the PEP summer conference, gave great examples of how restorative practice greatly reduced FTEs in Hull.

Officers recently held an attendance workshop for schools. Portsmouth has adapted attendance campaigns during Covid so that Miss School Miss Out is on hold with Welcome Back / Return to School campaigns used instead. The theme of *what children could become* will be resumed in the autumn with images of careers rather than sharks. The three LA Link Co-ordinators focus on chronic non-attenders (less than 50% attendance). Schools are challenged when they use reduced timetables for more than six weeks and there have been improvements.

In response to questions from members, officers explained giving a clear picture of attendance is complicated due to Covid and some figures do not look good, mainly as so many children are having to self-isolate. Next year's figures will reflect attendance more accurately and hopefully it will have improved due to measures implemented during Covid.

The Chair noted that with regard to the impact of long Covid on attendance, some families are being over-cautious about sending children to school whereas other children are badly affected. Attendance may have to be approached on a case by case basis as it is a complex issue.

NEETS (not in education, employment or training) - the PEP has endorsed adding NEETS as a tenth priority. Portsmouth has a statutory duty to prevent NEETS and compared with other local authorities is good at tracking and monitoring them. Significant progress had been made since 2013 when NEETS were at the highest, but in recent years the figures have begun to increase again, exacerbated by the pandemic. Officers referred to the various initiatives that have been run to help reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET.

In response to questions from members as to the effectiveness of initiatives, it was made clear that without such initiatives the figures would be substantially worse and in some LAs the situation is far worse. Officers would not recommend reducing or changing the initiatives as they have had an impact. Funding is a big issue for programmes as they tend to rely on external funding but Portsmouth is doing the best it can with limited resources. Tracking and monitoring young people helps.

RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note the following:

a. The agreed focus of the PEP Strategic Board for Year 2 of the

strategy as set out in section 3 of the report, namely: digital learning, peer review; improving literacy outcomes; and improving school attendance

b. The inclusion of an additional priority to the Education Strategy that focusses on NEETs as set out in section 4 of the report

c. The next steps and the refresh of the Education Strategy for Year 2 as set out in section 5 of the report.

The Chair thanked officers for their reports.

Members passed on their thanks to Alison Jeffery for her hard work and wished her the best in her new post. She has worked tirelessly to help children, families and education in Portsmouth.

The next meeting is on Wednesday 13 October at 4 pm (location to be confirmed).

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair