

EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Education Advisory Board held on Monday, 21 March 2022 at 10.00 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Sarah Daly, Director of Children, Families & Education
Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education
Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement and Early Years

Rob Sanders, Deputy Director of Anglican Diocese of Portsmouth

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ryan Brent, Terry Norton and Jeanette Smith, and from Frances Soul (Chair of Portsmouth Education Partnership).

2. Declarations of interests

Councillor Horton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as she is Vice-Chair of the governing body at Craneswater Junior School.

Debbie Anderson declared an interest as she sometimes works as an Ofsted inspector.

3. Minutes of previous meeting - 1 November 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2021 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

4. Ofsted school inspections summer and autumn terms 2021

Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement and Early Years, introduced the report. Since it had been written there has been one Section 8 inspection this term at Cliffdale School which continues to be Outstanding. Over 90% of children in Portsmouth are attending Good or Outstanding schools, which is a positive picture in view of the disruption caused by Covid.

Officers confirmed that the UTC's previous judgement of Inadequate was due to safeguarding not being effective. The UTC, with support from the Council, has done a considerable amount of work to address the issues. The UTC is now judged to be Outstanding following the most recent inspection and safeguarding is effective.

Ofsted are due to re-visit Mayfield School within the next 18 months. The school is vulnerable as the headteacher, David Jeapes, is leaving at the end of the summer. Recruitment is taking place for a new headteacher; although this creates vulnerability it is also a new opportunity for the school. Education will be monitoring and supporting the school closely.

Councillor Horton said it was very heartening all schools inspected over the last year were still maintaining their Good and Outstanding judgements.

5. Support and challenge for LA maintained schools

Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement and Early Years, introduced the report and outlined highlights from recent work.

As Ms Anderson is an Ofsted inspector she could advise in training sessions about new methods of electronic evidence gathering. The preparation for Ofsted session on the Top-Level View Conversation (the initial telephone call between the headteacher and lead inspector) was successful; a follow-up evaluation was positive. Training on Ofsted's "Early Reading Deep Dive" is crucial as if early reading is not good, then the quality of education is not good and likewise the quality of leadership. The training was delivered to senior leaders and English leaders who then cascade it to other staff. Schools are more prepared for inspection than they were in January and Ms Anderson constantly gets phone calls requesting training.

There was a peer review in the autumn term and since then Ms Anderson had led a third peer review. The process involves teasing out what schools are looking into and what they want to reflect on; it is not a judgement. A review is taking place in a school today. Some reviews were postponed because of staff absence and Covid. Many schools say staff and children are not used to seeing other people in classrooms. Having dedicated time for an objective view is powerful.

Eighteen primary schools are participating in the Destination Reader programme. At the moment evidence of its effectiveness is anecdotal but evidence will be more data led next year. Education would like Year 2 and Year 3 to benefit from the book project and potentially want to narrow it down to see if a transition unit of work like the one for Year 6 can be used for the transition from Year 2 to Year 3.

Schools are choosing their own Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programmes. As SSPs are a massive investment of training and resources Education's information overview of them is useful. Once chosen, implementation needs to be checked as the way they are delivered and implemented is what makes a difference.

The Senior Leadership Team meetings are a new initiative this term. It comprises termly visits to LA maintained schools to check in and develop relationships. Headteachers now feel they have a better working relationship with Education who in turn feel they have better knowledge of schools. Mike

Stoneman agreed that working relationships were much better and were at a mature stage. There are also good relationships with MATs (Multi-Academy Trusts). There are just 18 LA maintained schools now, which is unlikely to change much. On 30 March there is a meeting with LA maintained schools to discuss a memorandum of understanding on what schools and Education can expect from each other.

Councillor Horton thanked officers for a great report. Good work is being done but it is a question of ensuring it is sold the right way. The Portsmouth Education Partnership is working at maximum strength, partly as Covid forced joint working. The relationship with the Library service is very evident in the report. Councillor Horton had attended a learning walk at Craneswater Junior School on Destination Reader. As a former primary school teacher she was very impressed with the pupils' spoken language and wishes she had had those strategies when she was a teacher.

In response to a question from Rob Sanders about schools not using validated SSPs, and if this was a concern, officers said some schools initially said "letters and sounds" programmes work but SSPs are robust and everything in the curriculum matches. If a school's own programme is working an inspection team would probably be satisfied but the programme would need to have a very clear rationale. If a school's results were below the national average it would not have a case. Some schools who used "letters and sounds" have changed their minds. Some take time choosing an SSP from the range of validated programmes.

At the moment it is not known if the imminent White Paper will force academisation. Currently if a school is judged Inadequate it has to become an academy. A school with a double Requires Improvement judgement may have to become an academy. There may be moves to remove single academy trusts and towards MATs and further rationalisation.

Councillor Horton noted there was a focus on academisation by central government in the years before Covid but there are more pressing issues now.

6. Response to Covid 19

Mike Stoneman introduced the report, noting that since it had been written revised government guidance for schools had been produced during half-term. There was a rapid rise in Omicron infections after Christmas. The first half of the spring term was probably the toughest in terms of both staff and pupil absence. Some classes or whole year groups have had to revert to remote learning. The guidance to self-isolate for five days when testing positive continues to create enormous pressure and has led to significant staff absence. Recently, Manor Infant School had to close three classes and Year 9 at Mayfield School had to revert to remote learning. The second half of the term is likely to be equally challenging with infection rates rising significantly and adding more pressure.

Vaccination take-up in our secondary and special schools has been good and Education continues to support schools in conjunction with Public Health. The Director of Public Health sent a letter with new guidance to parents as there was some confusion with some parents thinking the self-isolation requirements have finished when they still apply. It is hoped schools will not have to partially close and move to remote learning, but inevitably there will be outbreaks.

Councillor Horton noted it was a difficult time for schools with the pandemic beginning to be over but not yet fully over. The current Covid strain is not leading to so many deaths and hospitalisations but people become ill with it and it impacts on the workforce. She thanked all teachers and school staff for their work.

Mr Stoneman said asymptomatic testing requirements had been dropped except for special schools. The absence rate in special schools is not good but they are supporting children who are at home. It is hoped attendance will improve significantly next term.

Councillor Horton thanked officers for their reports.

RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note the actions that have been taken over the past two years 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.

The next meeting is on Monday 18 July at 4 pm (location to be confirmed).

The meeting concluded at 10.40 am.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair