

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Friday, 12 January 2018 at 4.00 pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Neill Young (in the Chair)

Councillors David Tompkins
Ben Dowling
Paul Godier
Suzy Horton
Will Purvis

Sara Denham - Governor Representative
Rob Sanders - Anglican Diocese Representative
Helen Reeder - Teachers Liaison Panel Representative

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Ben Dowling.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Godier declared a personal interest as his Sister in Law works for Portsmouth Youth Offending Team.

Sara Denham declared a personal interest as she works for the University of Portsmouth.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 3 November 2017 (AI 3)

Rob Sanders pointed out that his name had been omitted from the list of attendees for this meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 3 November 2017 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.

4. A review into school attendance and part time timetables in Portsmouth (AI 4)

The chair explained that members had carried out the majority of their meetings with headteachers before Christmas. The meeting with Admiral Lord Nelson School was scheduled for 25 January.

Councillor Young invited members to feedback the main points from their meetings and explained that the notes from each of the meetings would be

circulated to the panel. Neil Stevenson, Attendance, Admissions & Reintegration Service Manager gave a brief reminder of the schools that members had visited.

St Edmund's - Secondary School

Councillor Young said he had been very impressed with the school approach to attendance. St Edmund's had a very high attendance record and members heard about a number of good practice initiatives. The school work with individual children to address barriers to attendance. There have been cases, for example, where the school have bought school uniforms for children of low income families. Councillor Purvis added that the school had highly personalised interventions and attendance was a key priority for the school. The school really understood their attendance data and constantly monitor and review this. The school has a strong senior leadership team and their key priority was creating somewhere that pupils wanted to attend. Councillor Purvis added that St Edmund's employ a school attendance officer. With regard to reduced timetables, the school did not like to use these and these are only used for pupils with medical issues. Another key point to note was the outreach work that the school does includes staff going to meet with every parent before their child starts at the school. This is a big time commitment but it was felt this helped parents understand expectations.

Flying Bull and Victory Primary - Primary Schools

Councillor Horton said that both schools were reflective about the range of challenges which local families faced, which could act as barriers to better attendance if not addressed. Both schools had also mentioned cut backs in the school nurse service having an impact on school attendance. She had been very impressed with Flying Bull's approach to working with the families of persistent absentees and this was now not an issue for the school, although they were aware that they still need to monitor this and not become complacent. The key message from both primary schools visits was that schools need to create an environment where children want to attend school. She gave an example that the headteacher had shared where pupils who are off sick have asked to go back to school before the 48hours as they do not want to miss a particular lesson they are enjoying. Flying Bull employ a member of staff whose role is to specifically monitor and improve school attendance.

Councillor Dowling added that Flying Bull's attitude to reduced timetables was that these should not be used as children need to be at school otherwise they are missing out on education. At Victory Primary School the attitude was slightly different and although they are not often used they do use this sometimes as a tool for different situations. Examples where a reduced timetable has been used included (a) getting a Reception child used to school to socialise with other children and (b) where a child is struggling with coping at school and is at risk of permanent exclusion.

In relation to reduced timetables, Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education said that Portsmouth has guidance in place to ensure that schools plan how the pupils on reduced timetables will progress back to full-time education within the maximum 6 week timeframe. If it is likely that this

timescale will not be met, schools must notify the local authority to explain the reasons why. Mr Stevenson added that pupils should only be moved onto a reduced timetable with the agreement of parents and if it is judged to be of the interest to the child. A strong case is needed and the expectation is that there are other interventions in place. The council also make clear to schools the safeguarding risks to pupils if they are on a reduced timetable.

In response to a question, Ms Jeffery said that this guidance applied to academy schools as well as LA maintained schools. With regard to numbers, Mr Stevenson referred members to the data in the initial report provided at the previous meeting and added that it was predominately secondary pupils on reduced timetables. Members felt that it would be useful to see data over a 12 month period to see the trends.

Harbour School - Special School

Councillor Tompkins said that attendance at the Harbour School has improved although it is not as good as the headteacher wanted it to be. Attendance is approximately 69% across the whole school compared to 70% for similar schools nationally. The head is very committed to improving attendance and there is a vocational curriculum which has really helped with school attendance as children are doing subjects they enjoy. All pupils study English and maths and there have been a number of successes. Councillor Godier added that he had been most impressed with the attitude of the headteacher and the fact that according to the headteacher no children are permanently excluded, the school work with pupils to achieve the best outcome for them. He had also been impressed with the headteacher's knowledge of the school and the individual approach taken. Mrs Jeffery added that there is an expectation that attendance will improve further when the Fratton part of the school moves into the new Vanguard site with purpose built facilities for vocational education.

Summary of visits

Members felt that they had heard about much good practice taking place at the schools they had visited. The passion of the headteachers for delivering the best they can for young people was notable. It was now important that this good practice is shared among schools in the city. Councillor Young said that when the panel's report was finalised the detailed evidence could be shared through the Portsmouth Education Partnership. Mr Stevenson added that this information could also be shared with the School Attendance Network (SAN). Mrs Jeffery said that it might be possible to use parts of the taped interviews with headteachers through the Portsmouth Education Partnership website with the permission of the headteachers.

In response to a question, Mrs Jeffery said schools do lose funding for a child who is permanently excluded. Exclusion for headteachers is a last resort and they will do everything they can, including reduced timetables to avoid excluding a pupil. Helen Reeder, the TLP representative and a teacher at a primary school in the city agreed that headteachers only exclude a child as a last resort. She explained that hard to place pupils are discussed at the Inclusion Support Panel. Each year group at the schools are RAG rated so if there is a hard to place pupil they will be placed at a school with a green

rating for that year group. Mrs Jeffery said that this system is very valuable for the city and envied by other local authorities. In response to a question, Mr Stevenson said attendance is not an indicator itself of a pupil being hard to place, but could be an indicator alongside others when making judgements as to whether a pupil should be categorised as Hard to Place.

Chronic non attendance

Anthony Harper, Early Help and Prevention Locality Manager (South) gave a short update on a proposed targeted approach to chronic non-attendance (lower than 50%). He explained that there are three localities; north, central and south and each has their own business plan looking at the core objectives. School attendance is a high priority for each of the localities. In terms of chronic non-attendance there are lots of reasons for this outside of the school.

Under the proposed approach, the council will examine data to identify all children whose attendance is less than 50%. The multi-agency safeguarding hub will triage this data to see if any children who are below 50% attendance are already known to children's social care. If services are already involved but there is no lead professional identified, the 3 Think Family Mentors based in the MASH will identify a lead professional and support the development of a co-ordinated plan. Where there are no agencies involved, school will be supported to refer into the Early Help and Prevention team for whole family support.

Mr Harper referred to the chronic non-attendance flow chart and said route 1 is something the LA will be trialling but hoped in the long-term will not be required. In response to a question he explained that where children are not attending school the service will work directly with their family. In some instances poor attendance is linked to the wider family and parenting capacity so the family worker is linked to the family to ensure that parents are engaged. This approach to chronic non-attendance will be piloted to schools in the South locality and at King Richard School during the spring term and then reviewed before rolling out to the other two localities.

Mrs Jeffery added that the council is encouraging schools to use the CSE toolkit more extensively. Currently children at risk are identified to the Safeguarding Board through the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) but these are predominately only the high risk children and they do not hear as much about the low risk children. It was noted that children can move from low to high risk very quickly and it is important to pool intelligence so that the true level of risk can be accurately assessed and appropriate action taken.

Elective Home Education

The panel noted the two feedback documents attached to the agenda that Portsmouth Parent Voice had collected from two of their workshops on elective home education (EHE). It was noted that one of the main reasons parents had chosen to home educate was due to dissatisfaction with the current offer and their perceived difficulties with SEN pupils getting an EHCP. On the whole (from those that fed back), the choice to home educate was not driven by ideology or a positive desire for a specific home based education

but by anxiety about the current school offer. Members noted that another reason parents choose to home educate is as an interim approach, if they cannot get their child a place in a preferred school.

Mrs Jeffery said that she could arrange for statistics to be shared with the panel on the rise of EHE in recent years, which is in line with the national trend. She added that numbers of home educated pupils had doubled over the last few years. Only 40% permitted home visits with a further 17% submitting written reports on progress. No information is held about the wellbeing or progress of the remaining 43%.

Councillor Horton said that parents often feel powerless if their children ask to be home schooled if they believe they are being bullied for example. Mrs Jeffery advised the panel that they may want to look at East Sussex's campaigning methods for school attendance which were harder hitting around positive, authoritative parenting. Examples included 'get a grip', 'don't be a mug' and 'good reasons for not attending school... there are none!' In response to a question Mrs Jeffery said that Portsmouth does use fixed penalty notice for parents taking their children out of school during term time. There has been a lot of discussion about whether fixed penalty notices are effective in tackling holidays in term time as often parents are not worried about paying the penalty as it is less than what they would have paid to have a holiday during the school holidays. Councillor Dowling said that Flying Bull got around this by using all of their inset days at the beginning of term in September. The headteacher encourages parents to book their holidays during this week and they find this works well. Others noted that training often needs to be carried out at intervals rather than all in one go.

Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would focus on elective home education (EHE). Councillor Young advised that Portsmouth Parent Voice had asked EHE parents if they would be willing to assist the panel with this review and contact had been made by one parent willing to attend a panel meeting to discuss their experience of home educating. Councillor Young asked that the Local Democracy Officer contact the parent to determine their availability before arranging a date for the next meeting in February.

March meeting

Members said it would be interesting to look at the hard hitting attendance campaigns of East Sussex and any other campaigns. It would also be good to look at best practice from schools and the pull factors.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 pm.

Councillor Neill Young
Chair