

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Education Advisory Board held virtually on Monday 8 February 2021 4.00 pm.

**Present**

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Frank Jonas BEM  
Terry Norton  
Jeanette Smith  
Judith Smyth

Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families & Education  
Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Children, Families & Education  
Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement & Early Years  
Sarah Christopher, PEP and School Inclusion Manager

Rob Sanders, Deputy Director of Education for Portsmouth Diocese

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Jeff Williams, Anglican representative. Mike Stoneman said that Fiona Calderbank, Co-Chair of the Portsmouth Education Partnership (PEP), had resigned from her post at Miltoncross in December and that Steve Labeledz has retired but would remain as Chair of the PEP until early July. Recruitment is taking place for an independent chair for a two-year term. The Chair asked that Mr Labeledz should be thanked for his contribution to the Education Advisory Board and his role in co-chairing the PEP.

**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. 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 represents support staff in Hampshire schools. Debbie Anderson works as an Ofsted inspector but not in Portsmouth schools. Currently all inspections are being carried out by HMIs.

**3. Minutes of previous meeting held on 14 October 2020**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2020 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.**

**4. Portsmouth Education Strategy 2020-2023: Update on progress in Year 1**

Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director of Children, Families & Education, together with Debbie Anderson and Sarah Christopher, presented the report and highlighted points from each of the nine priorities.

1. The School Leadership & Effectiveness Board (SLEB) took some time to establish in view of Covid but now has an extensive membership. SLEB is keen to gather partners' views on best processes and practices in order to for schools to set ambitious targets and consider how they will meet them. Schools are asked to consider what similar schools achieve and if below the median level of performance to consider how they could achieve similar. The specific questions to be put to schools were discussed at a recent meeting. Although there are no formal assessments or exams in 2020 and 2021 the aim is to have to more consistent and robust best practice processes in place from September 2021.

2. Digital learning has been a key focus in the Strategy's first year. Education was working on digital learning before Covid and has seized on the opportunity to develop it further. A contract with TSAT (Thinking Schools Academy Trust), a leading digital pioneer, has provided dedicated support and part-funded a Digital Development Officer, which has strongly progressed digital learning. The work in schools to enable education and interactivity between teachers and pupils, the latter especially important during lockdown, has been transformational. The contract has also enabled schools to meet DfE deadlines, for example, remote education plans for parents are on school websites and there is a dedicated page on the PEP website. Access to devices is key. As well as an allocation of devices from the DfE, Education has supplemented provision for primary schools through the EEF (Elementary Education Foundation) Trust. In addition, Education has launched a digital donation scheme with Shaping Portsmouth.

In response to questions from members on the extent of IT access and provision for children, Mr Stoneman said all schools have surveyed parents about access and devices. He cannot give a city-wide answer but schools are managing the situation so far and are in dialogue with Education where there are gaps. There is considerable support from the DfE as well as more local schemes. However, support for infant schools is weak as they are not in the DfE allocation of devices, which is shortsighted and disappointing as remote education is needed for Early Years and KS1. Education is stepping in to remove barriers through the Shaping Portsmouth donation scheme.

Mr Stoneman was aware of larger network companies who had signed up to offer free data to schools, but some of the offers were of poor value and more of a sales pitch. Sometimes if children were struggling at home it could be because of lack of space or having to share devices, in which case they would be deemed as vulnerable and schools would offer a place where possible. Education and schools are doing all they can to ensure access to learning, either at home or school.

Electively Home Educated (EHE) children are monitored to satisfy that suitable education is provided. However, it is made clear to parents that additional IT support is not offered.

The Chair noted that the digital divide, whether it is about quality of devices or IT access, would not go away and should be monitored. The enormous change in using digital technology could provide plenty of opportunities for

day-to-day education. Mr Stoneman said removing the divide was a long-term aim, not just for the short-term. Education is planning an event with TSAT in the summer on how to prepare for the next academic year but for the time being Education is building on what has been learnt and has a blended offer.

3. As a result of the 2019 literacy outcomes, particularly for KS2, literacy became a priority in its own right and the PEP Early Language and Literacy Group was set up. The group has three workstreams and membership includes representatives from speech and language therapy, health visitors, the University of Portsmouth and the cultural sector, in addition to schools and MATs. Reading needs to be improved across Portsmouth. There were two full days of training in January on the Hackney Learning Trust's Destination Reader programme, which is built on very secure subject knowledge for teachers to build on and sequence learning. The Pompey Pirates lead the third workstream focussing on the vocabulary schools want children to have when they transition to the next stage of education.

4. Interest in teaching vacancies has increased during Covid and the ITT (Initial Teacher Training) providers report good numbers. Part of this increased uptake is due to is likely to have been due to the Teach Portsmouth campaign. The TP newsletter is well-received with over 300 subscribers. A third webinar will focus on recruitment. The annual Teach Portsmouth Awards used to be held in October but will now be a virtual event on 8 July and include an award nominated by the community. However, recruitment efforts cannot be relaxed as there may be a dip in interest when Covid recedes. Mr Stoneman confirmed that in the last three years recruitment has reached out to people from other backgrounds as far and wide as possible, including the armed services.

5. Infection control is absolutely critical to support attendance. Schools have benefitted from the involvement of the Infection Control & Prevention Group, chaired by Helen Atkinson, Director of Public Health, together with support from Alison Critchley, Head of Sufficiency and Resources. The focus this term has been on testing. Vaccinations have started to be rolled out to school staff.

In response to questions from members, Mr Stoneman said the majority of lateral flow testing is for staff, particularly in primary schools, though some pupils are tested. Some secondary schools have continued with weekly testing for pupils. Three schools are already doing weekly saliva testing of staff and pupils in conjunction with the University of Southampton; four more will follow. Much work has been done to ease parents' anxieties. Schools have reported good feedback, engagement and uptake. It is hoped to roll out saliva testing to all secondary schools and colleges after half-term, then other schools depending on laboratory support. It could be a challenge when more children return to school. Schools will follow DfE guidance at that point. It is unclear whether there will be need to be saliva tests as well as lateral flow tests.

There are teachers and support staff both at school and at home, teaching children at home and school, so there is a mix of models. As a headteacher in the first lockdown Mrs Anderson stated that support staff were not penalised

financially if they were not in school. The Chair noted that pragmatism often decides who will be in school or at home.

6. The UTC (currently judged Inadequate by Ofsted due to safeguarding concerns) has received considerable support from the local authority, who have worked with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the Principal. The authority is grateful to the Portsmouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (PSCP) training team for the support and training they have given the UTC. The UTC now has three DSLs rather than one, is using CPOMS to record safeguarding and is now fully engaged with the local support and regularly attends the DSL network. There has been good uptake amongst schools of the training offered by the PSCP.

In response to questions from members, Mr Stoneman said the Portsmouth Safeguarding and Early Help Compact Audit was completed by schools and other agencies every two years which feels an appropriate timeline. The local authority is more closely scrutinising the completed audits by schools particularly where a school judges itself to be outstanding across many of the standards. Completion of the audit by schools is 100%.

The UTC has a full timetable and all teachers are fully engaged so their time cannot be deployed to safeguarding. The UTC has allocated significant time and resources to meet the requirements of the Ofsted inspection, for example, having three DSLs rather than one. There is a senior staff member as the new pastoral lead so training is in place and staff understand when to report, escalate and refer safeguarding concerns. As a trustee of UTC, Mr Stoneman is as confident as he can be that safeguarding is effective.

During Covid and the extended closure of schools there has been more identification of vulnerable learners. Alison Jeffery noted an increase in the autumn, then fewer over Christmas, then another increase but less than in the autumn. Numbers have plateaued over the last two or three weeks. There were more referrals from the police over the summer because of more young people being out and about. Social Care and Early Help have about 130% more referrals than usual. Early Help have the largest number of families in their three-year history. Issues are mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence; the latter represents the same proportion of cases at about 30%. Overall there is increased pressure and a changing pattern of referrals from schools.

7. Emotional health and wellbeing has been very important, especially over the last six to eight months. The third Mental Health Support Team (MHST) has just been recruited and has started their one-year training programme though training programmes have been impacted by having to use remote learning. The other two MHS Teams are already operational. Additional posts have been recruited to the MHS Teams, with a particular focus on behavioural needs. More concerns are expected when children return to school. There is a workshop for primary schools after half-term and one for secondary schools this week on how to support children when they return to school. Pathways are being mapped out to prevent children from falling through the net.

The free Kooth digital mental health service offers a number of counselling hours per day all year around and is confidential and secure. There are safeguarding mechanisms in place to capture concerns at an early stage. Some children and young people have already signed up. It is available for up to age 18 (25 for SEND).

Education has refocused government work on wellbeing during return to education on to staff so they can support children and young people. Education has invested considerable support for senior leaders.

The Chair said it was good to focus on wellbeing from the "end user" point of view. She commended Kooth's focus on wellbeing and the range of activities available.

Welfare sessions for all staff are recorded and can be re-visited. Education receive feedback from schools on staff wellbeing and asked headteachers last week if they needed any other support. Officers agreed there would be pressures after Covid. The MHS Teams can take a whole school approach and most schools have an employee assistance programme. Members commended the support available. They thought the situation should be monitored carefully in case more individual than group support was needed, for example, for those with PTSD.

8. The rating system for monitoring vulnerable children now includes a P (Purple) category for those who are most vulnerable. About 3,000 children are being monitored. There was a small spike in the number of electively home educated (EHE) children in the autumn as parents were very anxious about them returning to school. The number of EHE children is very small compared with those in other LAs but there may be another spike when schools re-open. Other LAs are concerned about possible spikes in the number of EHE children.

In response to questions from members, Mr Stoneman said it was difficult to confirm if parents were using school places unnecessarily and if the children of keyworkers were being denied places. Schools are consistently applying criteria but these are subject to capacity and transmission. For example, Court Lane is very stretched and is almost 50% full as it is near QA Hospital so has a lot of children whose parents are keyworkers. The criteria are applied rigorously as far as possible but sometimes schools have to prioritise places so there is consistency on principles rather than places. Portsmouth is above average for attendance but slightly below average for children with an Education Health & Care Plan, which is a concern and Education are encouraging schools to offer places to vulnerable children. Alison Jeffery said the authority can encourage discussion on applying the government's admissions guidance but does not have enough resources to oversee individual decisions by individual schools, for example, checking evidence of parents' employment status. Education cannot guarantee that no keyworkers have been told they cannot have a place. However, Education can intervene with individual schools if public service organisations have had problems with their employees' children getting places.

9. The capital bid approval for the programme of works required for the SEND and AP Accommodation Review will be considered at Full Council on 9 February. The special free school for autism will be in Wymering and is due to be completed in 2022. Members commended the progress on school building work, especially as it had taken place during Covid.

In response to questions from members on the three cross-cutting themes, Mr Stoneman said Portsmouth monitors ethnicity against achievement and has the benefit of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS). Often children with EAL (English as an Additional Language) achieve better than their peers, which is encouraging as it shows the results of investment and the work of bilingual support assistants. With regard to identifying children with SEND mainstream schools are more inclusive and better at identifying needs and providing support; the position is better than many years ago. There has been some spectacular work on diagnosing autism with the support of Educational Psychology service.

The Anti-Racism theme builds on existing work like the Kick It Out campaign as well as new initiatives. The theme will be promoted on the United Nations Anti-Racism Day on 20 March with which all schools will be involved. Education has contacted headteachers and resources will be compiled and shared amongst schools. Children will design posters with a slogan "Portsmouth Against Racism - One City, Many Cultures."

Members commended resources being co-ordinated and overseen by headteachers. The Chair noted there was a cross-cutting theme across everything schools do and it is good to consider key issues in-depth.

**RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note the progress that has so far been made in Year 1 in respect of the nine priorities that are contained within the Portsmouth Education Strategy 2020 - 2023.**

**5. LA Response to the re-opening of schools in the Autumn term and the subsequent lockdown at the start of the Spring term**

Mike Stoneman presented the report, noting that it built on the report at the October meeting. Much of the content had already been covered in the update on the Portsmouth Education Strategy. He highlighted two areas:

- During Christmas funds were used from the Covid-19 Winter Grant to provide food vouchers through a contract with EdenRed for children eligible for Free Schools Meals. The Covid grant and EdenRed will be used to provide vouchers during the Spring half-term as families and schools are familiar with the scheme.
- There is a focus on Year 11s as applications to post-16 education have decreased this year. Additional support includes the Flying Start website, webinars for parents and carers, and identifying pupils where there are the most concerns about post-16 destinations through the Youth Neet Prevention Programme (a traded service) by offering dedicated support from careers advisors. Despite challenging circumstances some face-to-face work has taken place.

**RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note details of the work and ongoing work that has, and is continuing to be undertaken, by the council and partners to support education settings in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.**

**6. Support and challenge for LA Maintained Schools**

Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement & Early Years, introduced the report, which builds on the report at October's meeting, noting that support for schools is proportionate to need. Two schools had had less than Good Ofsted judgements. Support included risk-assessed visits to the schools and commissioned support. Mrs Anderson was interviewed as part of the Ofsted monitoring visit to Corpus Christi Catholic Primary and has worked closely with the new headteacher.

Commissioning external support such as NLE (National Leader of Education) provides continuity for schools. Risk-assessed visits for schools with headteachers new to Portsmouth are useful as although they have a fresh perspective it helps them to have someone quality assuring their judgements.

The work with the local Lead Moderator supports teachers and leaders but also challenges accuracy of judgements about what children should be achieving. When reviewing schools' strategic plans they are asked how they will focus on impact and outcomes and not just actions. Education has reviewed all 21 LA maintained schools to see if their remote education information for parents meets the DfE's expectations on remote education. From 12 February it is a legal duty to publish the information. The DfE expectations emphasise that interactivity between staff and pupils is just as important as lessons.

The Hackney Learning Trust's Destination Reader project (renamed Reading for Purpose and Pleasure) has a systematic sequencing of reading skills which will enable the ten participating schools to progress. Annual subscriptions to the Trust will continue next year so schools can access updated resources. A network of participating teachers will enable collaborative working as way to support and challenge.

The PiXL (Partners in Excellence) organisation does not just provide assessment but resources to help schools use the findings. One LA maintained school is particularly supportive of the PiXL approach.

As there are no formal assessments this year moderation and assessment activities have been re-purposed in order to judge children's work accurately. Support will be given to help with transition.

External consultancy has been commissioned for coaching for five new headteachers. There is also a networking group to help support them. It is especially hard being a new headteacher during Covid.

In response to questions from members about the amount of 1:1 feedback from teachers, Mrs Anderson said although some teachers use pre-recorded

sessions they have put considerable effort into ensuring they are suitable. If there are problems parents should speak to the school first and then Ofsted. So far Ofsted has received one complaint and 40 positive comments. Remote education is light years away from what was offered in March 2020. Schools have been asked to send in positive quotes about remote learning to celebrate achievements.

The Chair said that if individual complaints can be investigated and lead to a positive outcome then schools are keen to hear them. Officers agreed the purpose of the Board is to scrutinise and consider difficult questions.

Members thanked officers for their reports and all those who are contributing to success as well as families who are engaging in education during very difficult circumstances.

**RESOLVED that the Education Advisory Board note how LA Maintained schools have been provided with support and challenge by the council's school improvement service in this academic year to date.**

The next meeting is on Wednesday 14 July at 4 pm (location to be confirmed).

The meeting concluded at 5.45 pm.

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Councillor Suzy Horton  
Chair