

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 13 July 2010 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.50 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Marilyn Badcock
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Dave Sexon
Councillor Val Smith
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Waine

Co-opted Members: Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Ms Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Governors' Association)

Officers:
Whole of meeting Ms S Taylor and Ms J Paine (Children, Young People & Families), Ms L Michelson and Ms M Holyman (Corporate Core)

Part of meeting
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Officers Attending
Mr I Watson (Children, Young People & Families)
Ms I Vale (Children, Young People & Families) and Mr N Wood (Chair of SACRE)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with the following additional documents:

Timetable for the Work Programme 2009/2010

Further Information on the Oxfordshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Data on Permanent Exclusions 2005/06 to 2009/10

and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

74/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Seale (for whom Councillor Hallchurch substituted), Mr C Bevan and Mrs Galina Kildyushova

The Committee was advised that, on the agenda, the Deputy Chairman should read "Councillor Dave Sexon" and not "Councillor Neil Owen".

75/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor N Turner declared a personal interest:

- (a) in all the items on the agenda which included reference to the North Oxfordshire Academy as he was a member of the governing body of the North Oxfordshire Academy;
- (b) in item 6 (Permanent Exclusions) as he was Chairman of the Mill Arts Centre, Banbury;
- (c) in item 8 (Work Programme) as he ran a youth group where young people played golf and was also a trustee of Hanwell Fields Community Centre.

Councillor Mrs Fitzgerald O'Connor declared a personal interest in item 5 (Update on the Select Committee on Educational Attainment) as a trustee of the Oxfordshire Play Association.

Councillor Hallchurch declared a personal interest in item 8 (Work Programme 2010/11) as he was Secretary of the Oxfordshire Institute of Directors and also owned a company based at the Oxford Science Park as Magdalen College and its Science Park were mentioned during the discussion on "Linking the Science Community to County Schools".

76/10 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 May 2010 were approved and signed.

On Minute 66/10 (Director for Children, Young People & Families – Update), the Committee was advised that all members (except Councillor Waine who was responsible for agreeing the admissions policy) could accompany appellants to hearings of school admission appeals.

77/10 UPDATE ON THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

(Agenda No. 5)

Councillor Bonner reported that the Select Committee had discussed:

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- whether schools suffering from the “cosy” syndrome could be encouraged to achieve more
- the development of federations where schools shared headteachers
- the use of children’s centres by parents and local communities
- the impact on performance of children attending children’s centres
- challenging the complacency of schools about being “good enough”.

The following comments were made:

- early years mattered
- learning patterns of young children were set by age 3 but could be changed
- it was better if children were not having to catch up but were ready to learn when they started school and intervention might be necessary to ensure this
- children learnt basic social skills and to play together in children’s centres
- children’s centres needed to be more welcoming
- a parent pack would be useful for parents so that they knew which skills their children should have by certain ages
- important for parents to be involved in their children’s education
- governing bodies should be enabled to challenge and to encourage their schools to strive for higher attainment
- all governing bodies have curriculum working groups where data on achievement could be reviewed
- development of staff was important to encourage them to believe in excellence for their pupils every day
- for some children, English was not their first language which could create some additional challenges
- pupils might not have a permanent home and might move house frequently within the City and consequently have to keep changing schools
- important for governors to undertake training: however, governors might not take up opportunities for training but it had to be recognised that they were volunteers.

Ms Taylor commented that getting the foundation stage right was important for the long-term investment in a child’s education. Three children’s centres had been rated as “outstanding” by Ofsted this year. Provision of early years’ services was variable across the County and if the centres which had been rated as “outstanding” shared their best practice with the other centres, it could help the latter to improve. There had been much development of children’s centres and early years’ provision and support was available to help children learn to read and play. Parenting classes were also available in children’s centres. Support might be needed for some pupils in their transition from early years to primary schools to secondary schools to sixth forms to higher education. “Satisfactory” was not good enough and the Children, Young People & Families’ Directorate continued to challenge schools and to advise them what they needed to do to achieve “good” or “outstanding”. Governing bodies needed to make the right decisions on leadership of the school even if this meant that they had to wait longer until they recruited the right candidate. The two federations were bringing benefits to the schools by sharing headteachers, leadership teams and resources enabling them to develop quality provision and opportunities for staff. There were other examples of mobile populations, for example, armed forces’

families. It was important to ensure that, for all pupils who changed schools, the systems were in place to send their records quickly to their new schools.

Ms Paine referred to research undertaken by Warwick University into children's learning up to the age of 3 at children's centres which had shown that children learnt a great deal from their parents, including by mirroring them. She talked about the importance of all the agencies working with families.

Councillor Waine reported that all local authority governors were sent correspondence twice a year outlining the authority's policies and their links to government policies. He added that it was difficult for governors to challenge schools but some governors were prepared to do this. He reported that there would be reductions in school improvement partners (SIPs) and area-based grants. Not all schools used SIPs as well as they should. He was concerned how the 20% of schools which had not taken part in Key Stage 2 tests would be able to judge their school's development without external assessment.

It was AGREED to thank the review group for its work and to ask the Corporate Performance and Review Officer to report to the meeting of the Committee in September 2010 with recommendations arising from the discussion by the Select Committee on 29 June and the discussion by the Scrutiny Committee at this meeting.

78/10 PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS

(Agenda No. 6)

Ms Paine and Mr Watson made a presentation to the Committee. Data on permanent exclusions 2005/06 to 2009/10 was circulated at the meeting. A copy of the presentation slides and data on permanent exclusions 2005/06 to 2009/10 is appended to the signed copy of the minutes.

Mr Watson updated the figures for permanent exclusions in 2009/10 on the presentation slide where "44" should read "45": he added that, for comparison, West Berkshire Council had had 4 permanent exclusions and Cambridgeshire County Council had had 124 and some authorities fast-tracked pupils to referral units instead of excluding pupils permanently. He drew the Committee's attention to the data which showed that currently one in three exclusions were female pupils but in the past it had been one in four and that the number of exclusions due to persistent disruptive behaviour had reduced from 33 last year to 12 this year and due to verbal abuse – adult from 16 to 2 in the same period. Schools were now more community-focused providing breakfast clubs and other facilities which had helped to improve attendance. Training had been provided to help teachers deal more safely with pupils who were getting into conflict situations. He highlighted that projects were now in place to improve pupils' skills and motivation for learning. Pupils who had been excluded were more likely not to be in education, employment or training. Ms Paine added that teams working with children and families on behavioural issues had helped to reduce the number of exclusions and that attendance at school by children who had offended had improved significantly and the Youth Offending Service was helping children not to reoffend. Mr Watson confirmed that there would be funding next year for the Back On-Track project based at venues across the county including

at the Mill Arts Centre, Banbury and officers were considering options for keeping the project running.

Members asked if data on exclusions could be made available to governors for benchmarking their school's performance to assist with monitoring.

It was AGREED to welcome progress in reducing the number of permanent exclusions.

79/10 THE STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Wood (Chair of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)) and Ms Vale (Religious Education (RE) Adviser). Ms Vale said that RE was the only subject to be determined locally. Oxfordshire had an Agreed Syllabus from Foundation Stage to post-16. By the end of Key Stage 3, all pupils had studied six major world religions. In addition, there was the opportunity to look at no religion's responses to different topics. All schools offered GCSE and attainment was in line with the national average. All education authorities were required to have a SACRE. SACRE set the RE curriculum and monitored its effectiveness. It met three times a year.

Mr Wood reported that members of SACRE were volunteers. He thanked Ms Vale who was retiring this year for her professional advice. SACRE had a statutory obligation to review the syllabus every five years. It monitored national developments/guidelines and took account of these when assessing how far Oxfordshire's syllabus conformed with them. It had an on-going programme of work, including producing an annual report. It met in public and its minutes were on the Council's website. Schools were requested to send information to SACRE and the Advisory Council supported teachers.

Members expressed concern that there was a shortage of RE specialist teachers locally. Ms Vale reported that nationally there was a shortage.

Ms Taylor thanked Ms Vale for her work on RE and sent her best wishes for her retirement.

A copy of information about SACRE was circulated at the meeting (copy of which is appended to the signed copy of the minutes).

It was AGREED that the Director for Children, Young People & Families should be advised that the Committee considered RE to have an important role in the curriculum and to endorse thanks to Isobel Vale for her work on RE.

80/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 (Agenda No. 8)

The Committee considered a report (CH8) and a copy of the timetable for the work programme for 2009/10.

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It was AGREED to make the following comments on the suggested topics and to consider the work programme and priorities at the September meeting:

Project	Comment
Linking the Science Community to County Schools	To include in the work programme scheduled for the spring.
Youth Centres	To form a joint Working Group with the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider admission policy to youth centres.
Children's Trust	Councillors Godden and Sexon to attend the Strategy & Partnerships Select Committee item on the Children's Trust on 22 July 2010 and report to the next Children's Scrutiny Committee.
Young People and Employment or Education	To hold a seminar in Spring 2011 to further the conversation in reducing the number of young people not in full-time education, employment or training.
Anti-Bullying	To ask officers to update on the service strategy development as well as the latest performance data as part of the work programme.
Safeguarding	To ask officers for a briefing to the Committee on recent changes to safeguarding arrangements and the implications for the Council with a Q&A.
Development of 'Free Schools'	To ask officers to report to the Committee on the recent proposed changes for schools' governance and funding and their possible implications for the Council with a Q&A.
Teenage Conception	To ask officers to report to the September or November meeting on the latest data with a Q&A.
Traveller Children and other Children who may switch schools frequently	To ask for an update following the proposed restructuring of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. This update would be scheduled in the work programme for the spring of 2011 with a Q&A.
Behaviour in Schools	Councillors Ahmed, Bonner, Owen, Sexon and N Turner to visit the North Oxfordshire Academy with Sally Taylor and Councillor Waine on 24 September 2010 and to report their findings to the Committee.
Admission to Special Schools (Suggested by Councillor Bonner)	To ask officers to report on the admission policy for pupils attending

	special schools with a Q&A.
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81/10 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee identified no items from the current Forward Plan on which it wished to have an opportunity to offer advice to the Cabinet before any decision was taken.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing