

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 3 April 2014 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.54 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Yvonne Constance
Councillor Simon Hoare
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Sandy Lovatt
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Val Smith
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Mr Chris Bevan

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley (for Agenda Items 6 &7)

By Invitation: Carole Thomson
Officers:

Whole of meeting Andreea Anastasiu, Sarah Jelley, Sue Whitehead (Chief Executives Office)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
7	Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager
9	Frances Craven, Deputy Director, Education & Early Intervention; Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

10/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Langridge and Sue Mathew.

The Committee was advised that Liz Smith had resigned her position as a co-opted member as she was no longer eligible having resigned as a governor.

The Chairman urged Councillors to encourage suitable governors to come forward. The clerk clarified that any governors identified would need to put their names forward through the formal process.

11/14 MINUTES (Agenda No. 4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman subject to the addition of Carole Thomson to the list of those attending.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments and corrections:

Councillor Stratford was in attendance as a member of the Committee and not as a substitute as indicated.

References to Mr Stan Taylor on minutes 1/14 and 3/14 to be amended to read Mr Stan Terry.

Minte 3/14: First sentence of 13th paragraph of the preamble to be amended as shown in bold italics and strikethrough:

Councillor Waine observed that although Oxfordshire was performing just ahead of the National Average in science, sustaining improvement ~~would be difficult~~ *had been a problem in the past and and a potential problem in the future.*

Minute 3/14: Last sentence of 17th paragraph of preamble to be amended as shown in bold italics:

Local authorities do not employ staff, *set curriculum, inspect schools* or hold school funds, and their impact on secondary schools is minimal.

12/14 STRENGTHENING THE LINKS WITH THE SCHOOLS FORUM (Agenda No. 6)

Carole Thomson, attended for this item in her role as Chair of Schools Forum and gave a presentation, on the composition, role and work of the Schools Forum, as part of a discussion about strengthening the relationship between scrutiny and schools forum. Following the presentation Carole Thomson addressed the question of strengthening the relationship between scrutiny and Schools Forum and referred to the Somerset model. This was a compact on collaboration across wider matters than finance and would be welcomed by the Schools Forum. She commented that most of the academies seemed to be keen to continue to work in partnership with local schools. Continued hard work would be needed to develop relationships. The possibility of a compact was currently being investigated by officers and there would be a report to a future meeting of the Schools Forum.

Asked about the allocation of funding between different phases of schooling Carole Thomson agreed that it could be confusing but that in Oxfordshire it worked well.

There was a general agreement to keep budgets as stable as possible. Councillor Tilley, Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families agreed that despite disagreements things worked better together and they supported one another. It was suggested that one way to strengthen relationships would be for members of the Committee to attend meetings of the Schools Forum to better understand their working.

There was some discussion of fairer funding and Councillor Tilley explained that the County Council was part of the F40 group of Councils lobbying Government for a fairer deal.

During discussion of the compact it was generally seen as a good thing although a member was wary about the proliferation of groups. Asked about its impact on externalisation Frances Craven indicated that with any externalisation there was a need for robust connections with a partner understanding that working together was critical to the school improvement agenda. A member expressed concern at the direction of travel of some academy policies and was keen that a similar message went to Academy Trusts that there is a common concordat. A compact if it could achieve that would be beneficial but he felt it would become more difficult as the picture fragmented. It was suggested that going forward consideration of a compact be done jointly. Frances Craven undertook to co-ordinate discussions with groups about a compact and to work with the Chair of the Schools Forum, the Cabinet Member and the Chairman of this Committee.

Asked if there was a place that Schools Forums could share best practice with one another it was noted that there were no longer national Conferences arranged by the DfE. Frances Craven added that there were networks of officers supporting the budget processes around schools. Members expressed an interest in learning more .

Responding to questions about whether the compact would enable the Schools Forum to take forward some of the issues identified at the last meeting around teacher recruitment and development, Carole Thomson replied that these were not matters for Schools Forum. The money was within the schools themselves. The Schools Forum was constrained by legislation. A member commented that he was aware as a governor himself that CPD work was going on in schools.

Following the discussion it was AGREED:

- (a) to circulate the presentation slides to members of the Committee;
- (b) to ask Gillian McKee to a future meeting to provide a briefing on school funding; and
- (c) to note that Frances Craven would co-ordinate discussions around the introduction of a compact and would work with the Chair of the Schools Forum, the Cabinet Member and the Chairman of this Committee.

13/14 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF VULNERABLE GROUPS (Agenda No. 7)

Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager, gave a presentation providing context to the data submitted on the educational attainment of vulnerable children. In

particular she explained the focus of HMI in the South East, detailed the actions being taken including the role of the Oxfordshire Teaching School Alliance and the role of support and challenge being provided by Ofsted.

Responding to a question as to the links of the Oxfordshire Teaching School Alliance with Schools Forum Sue Bainbridge explained that it was early days but some of the projects had been funded and supported by the Forum so she would want to see that link back.

During discussion members queried what estimates had been set on the improvement to be expected and how it was to be measured. Sue Bainbridge replied that there was a focus on individual schools and there was no Oxfordshire target. There was an absolute intention to narrow the gap and they did not want to be below the national average. At the same time they did not want to lose sight of the need to raise the achievements of all pupils.

The problems faced by white working class boys was discussed and Councillor Tilley stressed that regardless of a child's background the problem was a lack of aspiration. It was everybody's problem to ensure there were high aspirations for all. It was noted that some of the issues raised through the report, presentation and discussion could be addressed by the Education Attainment Working Group.

14/14 OFSTED FRAMEWORK SELECT COMMITTEE UPDATE (Agenda No. 8)

Councillor Waine, updated Members and indicated that Members would need to meet in advance of the next meeting in July. In terms of evidence it was suggested that it would be useful to hear from schools in different categories; not only from those in special measures, but from those in the requires improvement and outstanding categories.

It was AGREED that the Regional Ofsted Inspector be invited to a future meeting.*

*Correction agreed at the meeting on 17 July 2014.

15/14 PUPIL PREMIUM (Agenda No. 9)

Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education and Early Intervention, and Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager, attended for a discussion on how Pupil Premium is being used in schools in disadvantaged areas (**ESC9**). Lisa Biggin, Headteacher of East Oxford Primary School and Gill Standing, Headteacher of St Francis Church of England Primary School gave presentations on their experiences of the use of pupil premium. Lisa Biggin explained the school context with a high percentage of pupils having English as an additional language and 46% eligible for free school meals. She gave figures for the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at Key Stage 2 and highlighted progress on closing the gap. She explained the

strategies in place to sustain performance. She stressed that intervention, training and monitoring is key. Governors expect rigorous data on the effectiveness of the strategies. She added that the use of Children's Centres had been instrumental in their achievements.

Gillian Standing explained that her school was in the same partnership but that the context differed with significant numbers of pupils on the Special Educational Needs Register. The number had dropped with less on School Action. She had been leading in the area but would be handing over to an Inclusion Officer. She set out the 6 key principles of building belief, identifying pupils and analysing a range of data, improving pedagogy, early intervention, increasing learning time and individualising support. There was extensive training and close monitoring of English & maths – but also social, emotional & behavioural support. Ms Standing highlighted family support and engagement as being important as was the use of breakfast and after school clubs. Liaison with others was important and she stressed the role of children's centres/hubs where a greater level of support is available. She added that reading was a key to increasing confidence and that this often enabled things to fall into place.

The Chairman thanked both Headteachers for their presentations and the excellent work they were doing. He added that it was good to hear of the positive role of Children's Centres.

Responding to a question about the role of governors Gill Standing confirmed that there was a governor specifically tasked with responsibility for the pupil premium and it was also a standing item on agendas. Lisa Biggin confirmed that at East Oxford too, a governor, the Chair of the Resources Committee oversaw the pupil premium.

In response to a question about the impact of high levels of pupils with English as a second language Lisa Biggin referred to the difficulty of pupils being taken out of school for extended periods. There was some discussion about what if anything the Local Authority could do to assist schools. Frances Craven indicated that it was a difficult issue for our schools and they provided strong guidance from Governors Partnership working with the same message across a group of schools. It was important that schools felt able to follow the Policy. Councillor Howson suggested that this was something where the Local Authority could take a strategic approach and lobby government. Frances Craven confirmed that the authority recognised the problems around attendance and their role & responsibilities. They were looking at the Policy with a view to launching a new Policy at the beginning of June.

During discussion members discussed the impact from September of universal free school meals which could adversely affect numbers declaring for free school meals and therefore the pupil premium. It was suggested that a clear message was needed from the County Council to get the importance of declaring across. Frances Craven commented that there was a group looking at this.

A member was interested in the different approaches of the two schools noting that East Oxford was delivering something independent of parents where St Francis more parent dependent. The headteachers stressed that the objective was the same but

that there was perhaps a focus on different things and that levels of engagement could be slightly different in terms of access to language.

A member highlighted 2 areas where he felt the Local Authority had a role to play: firstly the ability to spread good practice; secondly in monitoring and scanning in strategic terms to be aware of difficulties that might arise to push progress backwards.

Frances Craven commented that the role of the local authority was about taking a helicopter view across County. It was about spotting good practice wherever it sits. Sue Bainbridge added that the refreshed attendance policy will look at the responsibility of schools and how Local Authority can support them to set high expectations of attendance and to develop an attendance culture.

A Member expressed his pleasure at hearing of the work of the headteachers. He queried whether there was cohesion and continuity over the transition to secondary school and if not what could be done. Both Lisa Biggin and Gill Standing gave assurances that specific work was undertaken around the transition period and that included secondary school staff coming into primary schools.

In response to a question from the Chairman about areas where the interventions they had heard about were not happening Frances Craven stated that schools were getting much more skilled in the pupil premium area. Ofsted was a key driver. Schools were taking it very seriously. Practice was not yet consistent and data can be provided around individual schools. There was still more to be done and it would take time. Discussions continued with secondary heads and primary schools and it was a major focus and would continue to be.

Sue Bainbridge explained the changes to the School Inspection Team with its focus on vulnerable learners. The majority of heads and governors know their core business but may not know what to do about it in every case. Her team was about training others to provide that safe challenge. Frances Craven outlined the specific responsibilities of the Local authority and the robust performance management measures in place.

The Chairman thanked all involved and concluded that educational attainment of vulnerable groups and pupil premium funding were two issues that should be revisited relatively soon.

16/14 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda No. 10)

During discussion of the Education Scrutiny Committee element of the draft annual scrutiny report to Council, a Member felt that given the work carried out the report could be phrased in more positive terms. She undertook to give her detailed comments to Sarah Jelley. It was AGREED that an updated report be circulated to Members when appropriate.

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17/14 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 11)

Members discussed the future work programme and it was agreed that consideration be given to including the following work items: Academy Sponsors - to look at what could be done to improve the pool of local sponsors; the implications of universal free school meals; basic needs funding and pressure on places.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

2014