

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 6 February 2014 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor David Bartholomew
Councillor Yvonne Constance
Councillor Simon Hoare
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Richard Langridge
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Lawrie Stratford (~~In place of Councillor
Caroline Newton~~)
Councillor John Christie (In place of Councillor Val
Smith)
Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Mr Stan Terry (in place of Ms Carole Thomson)
Ms Diana Wilson (in place of Mr Ian Jones)
Item 7 Mr Paul James (Head Teacher, The Cherwell School)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sarah Jelley (Senior Policy & Performance Officer) and
Andreea Anastasiu (Policy & Performance Support
Officer), Sue Whitehead (Principal Committee Officer),
Andrea Newman (Committee Officer)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

Items 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10

Officer Attending

Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education and
Intervention

Items 6, 7, 8,
Item 9

Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager
Allyson Milward, Academies Manager

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:

Item 12 – Scrutiny Annual Report

Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Val Smith (Councillor John Christie substituting), Mrs Liz Smith, Mr Ian Jones (represented by Ms Diane Wilson) and Mrs Carole Thomson (represented by Mr Stan TaylorTerry).

Councillor Melinda Tilley also sent her apologies, as she usually attends as an observer.

2/14 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Minutes of the meeting on the 14 November 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3/14 UPDATE ON VALIDATED 2013 GCSE SCIENCE ATTAINMENT RESULTS

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee had before them the report of Sue Bainbridge, Schools and Learning Manager. Mrs Bainbridge informed Committee that Oxfordshire, at 77%, were above the national average figure of 66% representing students who are entered for 2 GCSE Science papers. There was a wide variation in the number of students entered for GCSE Science from school to school. The number of students entered from The Oxford Academy had been affected by the ability to recruit science teachers.

The Committee were informed that where there had been a significant decrease in the numbers of students entered for GCSE Science papers, alternative subject options were being pursued by students at some schools, such as BTEC and Engineering qualifications.

The proportion of students attaining at least 2 GCSE Science grades A*-C's has varied in the past, with the figure dipping slightly last year to 70% in Oxfordshire, below the national average of 72%. Again, the Committee heard there was wide variation in this figure on a school by school basis.

Despite students sitting the English Baccalaureate (EBac) and other vocational courses, Committee heard that too many students were under-performing, with 6 schools in the County achieving grades significantly below the national average. There was a need to understand why students are underperforming.

It was noted that the percentage of A and B grade passes achieved in Oxfordshire, notably in GCSE Chemistry, is higher than the national average. However, passes at grades B and C are below the national average.

When asked, Ms Bainbridge advised that it was not clear if schools were super-serving high achieving children, or simply seeking good maths and English results. It

was also unclear which examination boards' schools were using. This is an issue that needed looking at in detail, in order to obtain a better understanding of the issues surrounding the data on this issue.

Although top-tier students were doing well, and those attaining lower grades were improving, data indicated that work may need to be concentrated on the middle section of students. Head Teachers groups had invited officers to attend their meetings as supporters. Officers were very aware of the need to support schools and academies regularly, as well as helping to develop links between local schools and the Universities. A new science partnership had been developed where experts in science subjects are able to share best practices.

Members noted in discussion that schools achieving top grades also appeared to have high attendance levels and a staunch approach to discipline in their schools. However, it was noted that in some schools the percentage of children entered in exams, compared to the percentage of non-achievement was astounding. A new emphasis on education was needed and the strengthening of links with the Universities was to be encouraged. It was noted, however, that more interest could be achieved in dealing with businesses direct.

The Committee expressed their view that work was needed on those students achieving mid-level grades. These students were more likely to contribute to the local area, being recruited by employers at technician-level. Those students achieving A* and A grades, were frequently lost to the local economy.

Officers re-iterated that tracking progress of cohort groups takes time, and that the team responsible for this was small. Although they had a statutory responsibility to maintain schools, there remained a need to support academies through influence and challenge.

The Committee discussed the difficulties of recruiting science teachers and expressed the view that if this was of difficulty during a recession, it would be even more challenging to train and work within Oxfordshire when things improved. Councillor Sanders remarked that housing costs had impacted on recruitment in city schools.

It was suggested that Oxfordshire Schools Forum be invited to address the Committee on professional development within schools, as they, rather than the Oxfordshire County Council, have the funding mechanism to ensure that schools are working effectively.

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 a potential problem in the future.*** Science subjects should be at the fore, given the science-based industries based within Oxfordshire, and the fact this is not the case is inexcusable. He felt that schools chose BTEC courses for students as this is an easier option. There were felt to be too many children within this category and schools were hedging their options, rather than raising expectations.

The Committee heard in discussion that apprenticeships needed looking at, as did developments in job creation. Students needed to get appropriate career advice, and be sure that vocational courses offered to them were suitable and sensible. These courses distorted league tables, as they were excluded from the figures.

Councillor Hoare indicated that those students doing well could possibly have private tutoring funded by parents. The Committee also noted that there was no information available with regards to the investment levels from parents buying into extra tuition.

Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education & Early Intervention, confirmed that the position was not straight-forward, and the data indicates that there are difficulties in vulnerable groups. The Committee also heard that there is evidence to show that some schools place their experienced practitioners with the more able students. Other schools concentrate their expertise in groups where students are less able, encouraging students to improve their grades from D's into C grades, and C's into B grades. The needs of pupils needed looking at and BTEC qualifications need viewing favourably, as equivalents to GCSE's. However, that is not to say BTEC's may not be the right qualification for some pupils.

Councillor Stratford recognised the need for improvement in sciences at Bicester Community College. He supported the suggestion for Oxfordshire Schools Forum to address Committee, and questioned the role of governors in their ability to challenge schools on this issue. He reminded Committee that Members of Parliament blame local authorities for failing schools, whilst the ability of council's to have an effect on schools has been whittled away. Local authorities do not employ staff, ***set curriculum, inspect schools**** or hold school funds, and their impact on secondary schools is minimal.

Mr Stan ~~Taylor~~Terry, of Oxfordshire Governors Association, informed Committee that a recent HM Inspector commented on the quality of challenge by governors when questioning and raising issues. He commented that there was a need for governors to receive training on the data available to them and how to interpret this information. The Committee confirmed their support for governors.

Ms Diane Wilson, informed the Committee that she represented thousands of members of the Council of Oxfordshire Teachers' Organisations (COTO), who are highly focused, working in schools across Oxfordshire with C/D borderline students. Many of these teachers provide afterschool and Saturday support to students, in a drive to improve results.

RESOLVED: The Education Scrutiny Committee noted the report and **RECOMMENDED** that the Oxfordshire Schools Forum be invited to address Committee on the development of Sciences within schools in Oxfordshire.

* Amendments as set out above in strikethrough and bold italics were agreed at the meeting held on 3 April 2014.

The Committee had before them a report on the Use of Pupil Premium in Oxfordshire Schools.

The Committee were pleased to welcome Mr Paul James, Head Teacher at The Cherwell School, Oxford, who gave a stimulating presentation on the Pupil Premium, its surrounding issues and the implications of both on his school.

The Committee congratulated Mr James and found his approach to be both impressive and enlightening. They were interested to hear he viewed the school community as a whole, building from the bottom up and the top down and how:-

- the school approached learning and development issues for both staff and pupils, in order that targets are met;
- the school strived to do simple things well;
- data is analysed and used within the school, as a basis for intervention with pupils as and when necessary;
- parents are encouraged on an individual basis to engage with the school, and thus support pupils in their learning;
- a shift of attitude has been encouraged, in order that pupils take responsibility for their work, receive support from the school through holiday revision courses, are supported extra-curricular activities and
- pupils are held to account, in order that they actually deliver what is asked and expected of them.

5/14 OFSTED CATEGORIES

(Agenda No. 8)

Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education and Early Intervention, confirmed to Committee that the report before them exhibited the different levels of activities expected of schools in line with the three different categories of:-

- good and outstanding,
- requiring improvement and
- special measures.

In discussion, Committee heard that the document had not been previously shared with The Schools Forum, although the documents appended to the report had been sent to schools and governors on several occasions.

There was discussion as to how the budget would be affected if Ofsted inspected several schools which were all moved to a different category at a similar time, needing more support from the Council in the process. Sue Bainbridge confirmed that year on year data was analysed, providing the Council with an insight as to which cohorts of schools are likely to expect an inspection by Ofsted. Funding can then be set aside for schools which may for example, have a weakness or be at risk of falling into the special measures category. There is a pool of expertise from which officers are able to draw, channelling that knowledge into schools. However the concern is whether or not there are enough funds available within this resource. Officers predict as far as they can, where and if funding is needed, which may then mean curtailing other project work.

Councillor Langridge raised the issue of Wood Green School, which went from being classed as outstanding to in special measures. He queried whether the Council had been at some fault in failing to spot the decline, but received an assurance that officers were now confident there is less risk of this situation being repeated due to new data analysis procedures.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

6/14 ACADEMIES (Agenda No. 9)

The Committee had before them the report of the Director for Children's Services on the End of Year (2013), Academies Programme. Allyson Milward, Academies Manager, informed the Committee that 2013 had seen a steady stream of conversions within Oxfordshire. There was now a tendency for schools to convert in groups, but there had also been significant variations in conversion rates.

By April 2015, it is anticipated that 40-50% of existing schools will be academies, as well as the newly-formed academies specialising for children with specific educational needs i.e. children with autism. Officers have built new relationships, learning to work with new academies in different ways. It was reported that groups of schools converting at the same time were easier to deal with.

During discussion it was noted that there is a slower take-up from the primary sector, as they are unsure of the benefits offered by conversion to academy status. There was a tendency for schools to become defensive as essential services i.e. HR, legal and insurance provision, are withdrawn by the Council. Schools appear to have more confidence buying in these services as part of a group. It was observed that conversion to academy status was effectively driven by secondary schools in the county. The average cost to the Council of a school converting was £10,000, although this was a crude figure. There are three staff members who cover advice on HR, legal issues, finance and property issues. Issues such as buildings transfers, although detailed, are now involving more standardised processes and procedures.

Concern was also raised that Carillion were carrying out assessments within schools for works required in order to provide Free School Meals. Carillion would then later be the contractor carrying out those works. It was noted that appropriate checks and measures were in place in order to minimise misuse in this process. The Committee noted that there would be a written question to Council on this matter from Councillor Stratford.

In respect of paragraph 17 of the report, it was noted that the new academies would impact massively on Capital Funding in terms of places. Tyndale Community Primary School would extract capacity from Oxford schools, whilst Heyford Park School had secondary capacity. The Committee also heard that the MacIntyre Academy, for Autistic Children, plans to have places for 25 students, with 8-10 residential places.

Ms Milward confirmed that the Education Funding Agency (EFA) had written to the Council confirming the adjustments to Capital Funding, but there was essential work on-going with regards to this matter. Councillor Waine requested that this letter be

brought to the next meeting of the Committee, as there were major issues surrounding this and funding under Section 102.

The Committee also considered what could be done to encourage more bodies to sponsor schools, and heard that officers were working towards growing a pool of local sponsors. Some applications were currently with the DfE, in relation to primary and secondary academies, and the Council had placed advertisements in Schools News for speakers as to what it is like to be a sponsor. Although there is little financial incentive for sponsors initially, grants are available and bodies can then express an interest in running a new school for example.

Committee also heard that The Warriner School had consulted with the DfE for advice, and their brokers were involved. Although the Council do speak to the DfE Sponsorship Team, they prefer to deal with schools direct, rather than the local authority. Officers advised the Committee that they meet with the DfE brokers on a 3 monthly basis, and have a good relationship with them. Where the Council are aware that the DfE are due to send a team into schools, they will arrange to send an Officer to the school at the same time. However, on occasions visits have been made without warning. The Committee noted that the DfE had treated the Council badly in the past, and the DfE should be made aware of this.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

7/14 THE OFSTED FRAMEWORK SELECT COMMITTEE UPDATE (Agenda No. 10)

Councillor Waine referred to the Minutes of the Ofsted Framework Select Committee, which had been circulated and were attached to the Agenda. He confirmed that the Select Committee felt strongly that it should now be inclusive of the entire membership of the Education Scrutiny Committee, in order that the Select Committee's decisions carry the full weight of the parent Committee.

The Select Committee were of the view that the attendance of Mr Matthew Coffey, the Ofsted Regional Director, at the Education Scrutiny Committee was important to allow for discussion as to the role that Oxfordshire County Council and local authorities generally, are to play in education. It was **AGREED** that consideration be given to inviting Mr Coffey to attend a meeting of the Committee at a future point, subject to the constraints of his diary. In discussion it was noted that it would be helpful to have a clear statement or directive from the Regional Director, in order that the Council could have a better understanding of its role.

Frances Craven, observed that it would be helpful to have a document go before Committee and Cabinet for discussion, in order to obtain a clearer picture as to the forward direction across the Council.

8/14 THE ATTAINMENT WORKING GROUP UPDATE (Agenda No. 11)

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Attainment Working Group, from their meeting on the 6th February 2014. It was noted with regards to paragraph

..... 5 that the primary sector needed to be looked at, and the Committee supported the continuation of the Attainment Working Group.

9/14 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS
(Agenda No. 12)

The Committee had before them the Education Scrutiny Committee forward plan, circulated previously with the Agenda, and a further paper on the Scrutiny Annual report, tabled on the morning of the meeting.

Frances Craven stated that following the Bullfinch investigations, a report went to Cabinet concentrating on schools involvements. There was a concern of duplicating the issues of the local safeguarding board. It was suggested that the Cabinet paper should also be circulated in advance of the next Education Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Stratford suggested that the Schools Forum needed an agenda item for an up-date to Committee, and that a paper should come before Committee. This needed including on the Committee's forward plan. It was suggested in discussion that reports should be circulated in advance and questions emailed to Officers in order to free up time at meetings.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

2014