Division(s): All

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 JUNE 2020

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Report by Deborah Bell – Head of Service Learner Engagement

RECOMMENDATION

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider and note this report.

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) led on the creation of a Learner Engagement Strategy to support the Corporate, Children's Trust and Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board aims and aspirations to improve school attendance, reduce exclusions, reduce children missing education & children electively home educated and ensure that Alternative Provision arrangements meet the needs of all schools and children in Oxfordshire.

Process

2. Oxfordshire County Council invited partners to form the Learner Engagement (LE) Strategic Board. The first LE Board convened in December 2018. In no priority order, members of the LE Strategic Board include representative:

   - Secondary School Leaders
   - Primary School Leaders
   - Special School Leaders
   - Governors
   - Thames Valley Police
   - School Nursing Service
   - Public Health
   - CAMHS
   - Children's Social Care
   - Parents/Carers
   - District Councils
   - Anglican Diocese
   - Oxford Youth
   - OCC SEN, School Improvement and Early Years

3. The LE Strategy was coproduced by all these representatives based on shared priorities, need and aspirations.

4. Since December 2018 the LE Strategy has informed the LE Work Plan which details strategic and operational actions.

5. In September 2019 a strategic decision was agreed to merge the Early Help (EH) Board with the LE Board as Early Help Services is where the officer resource is placed for early intervention and prevention to review exclusions and poor attendance.

Impact

6. The merger of both multi-agency boards has offered a timely vehicle for strategic medium and long-term recovery work as we emerge from COVID-19 into a new world. This has afforded a sound platform to launch the Early Help network on behalf of schools to ensure a rapid response to emergent issues as children return. It has also facilitated effective partnership work which created this Return to School recovery resource. http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/returning-school-after-lockdown

7. Elective Home Education rates in Oxfordshire had stabilised pre-COVID-19. This is compared to a 25% increase nationally.

8. The co-produced Behaviour Pathway has been created and shared with school leaders to offer a systematic approach to better meet children's needs, thereby avoiding the need to exclude, using SEND systems, Early Help offer and inclusive practices. It has been used to successfully rescind four proposed permanent exclusions to date since 23rd March 2020.

9. Children Missing Education policy and practice has been reviewed and internally audited for risk assessment. This demonstrated effective work with a 'Green' rated finding. Children Missing Education numbers in Oxfordshire are low for the size of the population. All reported Children Missing Education are known, being offered services and tracked.

10. Re-integration Timetable data is now significantly more accurate and being followed up with schools half termly. COVID-19 is anticipated to impact on this and Flexi-Schooling applications by parents.

11. Guidance for schools on managing and engaging abusive visitors has been co-produced, published and welcomed by school leaders.

12. Following requests by school leaders, co-production of model policies and training on the new Relations and Sex curriculum and Anti-Bullying have been produced and awaits sign off by Members at Informal cabinet in September 2020.

13. Cyber-bullying resources and guidance have been produced to drive down the need for children to be absent from school.

14. Alternative Commission recommissioning project is on track for delivery by September 2021. Clarity on amended arrangements from September 2020 are progressing at pace to better meet the needs of excluded children. This will reflect the rise in demand for primary provision and the reduction in demand for Key Stage 4 provision.

15. Restorative Practice training offer has been made to all schools in the county to reduce the need for exclusions. This is in partnership with Children's Social Care and Thames Valley Policy policies and operational approach. It has already been effectively deployed to prevent two exclusions and two elective home education decisions.

16. Primary and Special School overall attendance and persistent absence rates are improving.

17. Oxfordshire remains a low excluding county compared to national averages.

Financial and Staff Implications

18. The financial implications of the LE & EH Strategic Board and Strategy is based on most efficient use of allocated budget for previously disparate service areas within OCC. The resourcing of officer capacity for LE and EH work will be reviewed as part of wider Service design work that has been temporarily suspended during the COVID-19 situation.

Equalities Implications

19. The primary purpose of the LE and EH Strategic Board and associated Strategy is to ensure improved access to all educational opportunities for all children in Oxfordshire regardless of additional needs and social or economic disadvantage.

Sustainability Implications

20. None in addition to OCC and partners usual considerations.

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Background Papers: Annex 1: Learner Engagement Strategy

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