

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 1 October 2015 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.05 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Kevin Bulmer
Councillor Steve Curran
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Richard Langridge
Councillor Sandy Lovatt
Councillor Gill Sanders
Mrs Sue Matthew

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley

Officers:

Whole of meeting Andreea Anastasiu, Policy Officer; Sue Whitehead (Corporate Services)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

	Officer Attending
6	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education and Learning
8	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education and Learning and Gillian McKee, Finance Business Partner for Children Education & Families (CEF)
9	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education and Learning

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.

31/15 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 1)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular Sir Robin Boshier and HMI Sarah Hubbard who were here for agenda item 5.

32/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Harrod (Councillor Mills substituting).

33/15 OFSTED REGIONAL DIRECTOR, SOUTH EAST REGION DISCUSSION

(Agenda No. 5)

Sir Robin Boshier, Ofsted Regional Director, South East Region and Sarah Hubbard, Her Majesty's Inspector, South East Region updated the Committee on the work of Ofsted and its priorities.

Sir Robin explained the organisational framework for Ofsted and commented that the regionalisation meant that it was possible for the regional offices to get to know the authorities in a region better and he introduced Sarah Hubbard who was Oxfordshire's link HMI. He detailed the new operating model and that they were bringing in a new common framework. Inspections had been brought wholly in house and a rigorous assessment programme was in place to ensure quality. The number of current practitioners (Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers) had been increased and it was his wish to see the proportion grow. Ofsted benefitted from their experience and the Inspectors gain by taking back their knowledge and understanding of Ofsted to their schools and local areas. He explained that the common framework would apply across schools, colleges and early years and that the new model would see good schools get a 1 day short inspection every 3 years with the option for Ofsted to convert it to a full inspection if necessary.

Sarah Hubbard as Oxfordshire's link HMI commented that she had a productive relationship with County Council officers and noted recent results highlighting achievement and areas of concern.

There followed a question and answer session where the following points were made:

- 1) Sir Robin advised that the link HMIs, as an excellent resource, were the key in respect of Ofsted supporting the Committee in providing constructive challenge to schools and academies and in assisting the council in its role of championing good educational outcomes for Oxfordshire and young people. Sarah Hubbard added that there were a number of handbooks on the framework that Members may find helpful. She also referred to a recent report on NE Lincolnshire that provided valuable insight into areas of concern.
- 2) Asked about the view of the Scrutiny function across the South East area Sarah Hubbard referred to an interesting report of a Select Committee held on 27 January on the way in which Scrutiny Committees work. She commented that some areas seemed to be doing a good job and highlighted the work in Bristol,

York, Calderdale and Hampshire. She added that it was very much an evolving landscape but that it was clear that as elected members there was a role for Scrutiny to play. Sir Robin added that it was very much a mixed menu.

- 3) There was some discussion on the way in which the role of the county council as champions of all children in Oxfordshire could be reconciled with the limited leverage in relation to academies. In particular a member referred to the different relationship with multi academy trusts and concerns about how the county could deal with remote policy making. Sir Robin recognised the role of the county council in representing all children and young people and indicated that there are ways to approach the task. An important aspect was to keep good regular data on all schools that was reported regularly to the Committee. If academies were not willing to release information such as GCSE results then it was important to let the Regional Commissioner know. He encouraged the Committee to use the Regional Commissioner for the purpose of challenging academies. It was important to be clear about concerns and to hold him to account by inviting him back as necessary. The same was true for Chief Executives of Multi Academy Trusts. He added that the local authority had an absolute right to access around safeguarding. It was important to get into the schools, to meet the leadership and to forge those relationships that would allow the council to fulfil its responsibilities. Sarah Hubbard added that the council had a statutory duty under missing children and that attendance figures and the way that these are monitored were key.
- 4) Sir Robin, asked about his relationship as Ofsted Regional Director with the Regional Commissioner and other educational organisations, advised that there was no formal relationship. Independence was paramount for Ofsted. They had a meeting once a year to share data.
- 5) Asked about the inspection of home schooling Sir Robin undertook to provide a brief factual note.
- 6) Sir Robin responded to questions on the quality of Inspections and maintaining that quality in the face of budget pressures and replied that he had confidence in the Head of Ofsted who would do his utmost to maintain quality. Asked about an increase in desk analysis, Sarah Hubbard gave an assurance that this was not the direction of travel.
- 7) There were a number of questions around the consistency of judgements by inspectors and Sir Robin assured members that ensuring consistency was one of his key priorities. Ofsted had invested heavily in training and he detailed what it entailed. It was early days and he would be happy to update members on his next visit to the Committee.
- 8) There was discussion around the issue of schools who were net importers of challenging pupils and how they were treated by Ofsted. There was also discussion of the importance of encouraging good headteachers to take on challenging schools. Sir Robin stated that a challenging school would not always get a bad report as they would be judged on the progress being made. It was important that headteachers were not penalised for having the right values and a new accolade was available for "Outstanding Leaders". A head teacher taking on a challenging school could request a 6 month inspection holiday.
- 9) With regard to challenging pupils Sir Robin indicated that permanent exclusion figures were a key aspect of the inspection, not just the numbers but the reasons. If there was concern that a school was over excluding the local authority should write to the Regional Commissioner. Inspections looked beyond the data and would also find schools that were managing to retain pupils against all the odds.

- 10) Asked how Ofsted assesses British values in a multicultural society and how the Committee could help to promote and encourage such values Sarah Hubbard replied that they always looked at protected groups under the equalities legislation. Assessments looked to see that the fundamental social, moral, spiritual and cultural agenda was reflected in the curriculum. She referred to the PREVENT agenda which was relatively new to schools.
- 11) With regard to narrowing the gap and asked about best practice elsewhere Sir Robin highlighted the London and Manchester Challenges. Sarah Hubbard detailed the types of factors that led to schools not narrowing the gap effectively. This included where 5-20% of the students were from a disadvantaged background, where leadership was less effective with governors not taking the gap into account (often due to lack of data) and the where the quality of teaching was not sufficient.
- 12) Asked about the position in Oxfordshire Sarah Hubbard highlighted the good work that was being carried out and the areas of concern.

The Chairman thanked Sir Robin and Sarah Hubbard for their attendance and it was AGREED that they be invited to attend again next year.

34/15 DISCUSSION ON THE MATTERS RAISED DURING THE PREVIOUS ITEM (Agenda No. 6)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education and Learning attended for this item together with Councillor Melinda Tilley, Cabinet member for Children, Education and Families. Councillor Tilley welcomed the approach set out by Sir Robin which seemed to be to look for the good work being done. Rebecca Matthews commented that the discussion had raised a number of interesting points. She welcomed the possibility for a new head teacher in a school requiring improvement to seek a delay in the inspection. They did have a good relationship with the Regional Commissioner and were already building relationships as suggested by Sir Robin. She gave examples of meetings with Multi Academy Trusts to consider permanent exclusions. It was AGREED that the Committee receive regular updates on how relationships were building.

Councillor Curran asked to be kept informed with regard to the concerns over Blackbird Leys which Sarah Hubbard had referred to.

A councillor suggested that Didcot Girls School be invited to a meeting as they had been used as an example of good practice. Rebecca Matthews indicated that it would be helpful to wait for the annual report and to arrange something appropriate at that point. Councillor Tilley added that there were other outstanding schools.

35/15 MINUTES (Agenda No. 7)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July were approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following corrections:

Minute 28/15 – the word ‘dome’ corrected to read ‘done’ in point (4);

Minute 29/15 – The spelling of ‘Sarah Varnum’ to be corrected to read ‘Sarah Varnom’.

In relation to Minute 27/15 Rebecca Matthews advised that in relation to action (j) referred to in the first paragraph of the preamble an interim person was in post.

36/15 SCHOOLS REVENUE BALANCES - UPDATE

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee considered a report that gave an update on the meetings held with maintained schools in the Spring of 2015 to challenge plans for use of balances, where schools had consistently retained surplus revenue balances at the end of the last four financial years. Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning and Gillian McKee, Finance Business Partner for Children Education & Families (CEF) attended to respond to questions.

Rebecca Matthews explained how the three schools invited in to discuss the level of their balances had been chosen. A member welcomed the overall reduction in balances set out in paragraph 10 of the report. The Chairman noted that there would be an update at the end of the year and Rebecca Matthews confirmed that schools were very aware that they would be scrutinised.

It was suggested that given the tough budgetary position in future more focus should be on those schools just breaking even, or in deficit and those schools becoming academies. It was suggested that this Committee should consider whether a report was needed on academy and free school balances.

The Education Scrutiny Committee AGREED: to:

- (a) note the contents of the report;
- (b) note that schools will be reminded of the need to spend revenue funding on current cohorts of pupils as part of the annual budget setting process;
- (c) note that if schools are identified as having consistent surplus balances they will be challenged and may be invited in to discuss proposed use of balances with Councillors and the Deputy Director for Education & Learning.

At this point it was agreed to vary the order of the agenda.

37/15 MACINTYRE ACADEMIES TRUST - ENDEAVOUR ACADEMY: A REVIEW OF THE FIRST YEAR OF ACTIVITY (PRESENTATION)

(Agenda No. 10)

Brenda Mullen, Managing Director of MacIntyre Academies Trust and Nicky Wills, Principal, Endeavour Academy gave a presentation on the first year of the Endeavour Academy and the work of MacIntyre Academies Trust.

The Committee was advised of the background of the Trust which had its roots in Oxfordshire and worked closely with the County Council. Nicky Wills explained the Academy provided local educational provision for children with autism having

complex needs and included residential provision, both long term and short breaks. She detailed the services available for children and young people at the Academy, explained the approach to learning and how achievements and progress was measured.

During discussion members heard how the split between school and home life was managed for those children who were residential. There was no scope to enlarge the school but they were looking at other models including opening a hub within a mainstream school. There was some discussion of the trends in cases of autism and a suggestion that future demand could be problematic. Brenda Mullen explained that they worked within the legal requirements and would treat a cross boundary application like any other. Nicky explained the process to select pupils for the schools and the importance of family involvement. That involvement was facilitated if the children were local. The 25 places at the school were based on a needs analysis by the County Council. Funding was the same as for other academies with the social care funding through children's services.

Responding to a question about arrangements for children after the school Brenda Mullen explained that The MacIntyre Academies Trust was set up to run the schools but was supported by a national charity. They had a long history and practice of working with people with a learning disability. Nicky Wills added that they worked with other agencies and supported families but there were limited opportunities out there.

The Chairman thanked Brenda Mullen and Nicky Wills for their attendance.

38/15 UPDATE REPORT AND CHANGES TO THE LA RISK REGISTER FOR THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee considered a report that outlined the progress being made by the Local Authority in preparation for a potential Ofsted inspection of school improvement functions. It highlighted changes to the LA Risk Register against the key triggers.

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director of Education and Learning introduced the contents of the report.

The Chairman referred to the large number of items for this Committee to consider as set out in the appendix and it was noted that some of these would need to be considered only bi-annually.

Rebecca Matthews responded to concerns around the traded service, financial aspects of schools, the need to challenge academy and local authority schools and NEETs and the funding available to parents.

The Committee AGREED to note the Update Report and to continue to ensure that their forward work plan contains appropriate Scrutiny coverage of the nine inspection themes.

**39/15 YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, OR TRAINING:
PROGRESS REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP**
.....
(Agenda No. 11)

It was proposed and AGREED to defer consideration of this item to the next meeting.

40/15 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS
(Agenda No. 12)

After consideration of the forward plan the following items were prioritised:

- Schools' Performance Data
- Draft Education Strategy
- Draft Vulnerable Learners Strategy
- NEETs
- Exclusions (to also include the positive aspect of schools doing well to keep challenging pupils in school)

Reference was made to comments from Sarah Harding that tuition for those coming into nursery work was inadequate which was concerning. Rebecca Matthews indicated that this had implications for the County Council in terms of in-house training once employed.

It was AGREED that future visits be arranged to see the work of the MacIntyre Academies Trust and the UTC

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2015