

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 25 November 2020 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 3.05 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair
Councillor John Howson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Jeannette Matelot
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Susanna Pressel (in place of Councillor Emma Turnbull)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services.

By Invitation: Mr Donald McEwan, Council of Oxfordshire Teachers' Organisation (COTO) and Mrs Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors' Association.

Officers: Corporate Director for Children's Services, Kevin Gordon, Deputy Director Education, Hayley Good, Deborah Bell, Kim James; Robin Rogers and Deborah Miller (Law & Governance).

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.

27/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Emma Turnbull (Councillor Susanna Pressel substituting).

28/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda No.)

Councillor John Howson declared a personal non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 7 by virtue of his position as a Director of a company that undertakes research of the subject.

29/20 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 September 2020 and 23 September 2020 were approved and signed subject to the following amendments: Minute 21/20 substitute 'earlier' with 'early' and Minute 22/20 substitute 'McKewan' with 'McEwan'.

Matters Arising

In relation to Minute 23/20 Councillor Susanna Pressel queried how many laptops had been distributed to children and whether there was any support with internet access for families.

The Director for Children's Services, Kevin Gordon responded that they were currently undertaking a piece of work with the Voluntary Sector Group examining how they could get a wider rollout of laptops, as the laptops they had received from the Department for Education was a limited number and they now believed it was going to be a long-term issue, so there was a need to find creative ways of achieving it. They were also looking at the idea of 'sharing data' with the possibility of adults giving up unused data into a pool, which was an idea used extensively and successfully in Australia.

The Director undertook to keep the Committee updated and informed once something was in place.

Councillor Gill Sanders reported that much of the Councillor Priority Fund for the year had not been spent and suggested that the unspent Councillor Priority Fund could be used to buy laptops and dongles for children in schools. The Chairman undertook to ask the Chairman of the Council to ask Councillors to consider contributing the money.

Councillor John Howson suggested that members approach the Multi Academy trusts within their areas to see what they were doing and to collect some data and map the scale of the need.

Kevin Gordon reported that they were doing a 'light touch' data collection to understand the position.

30/20 UPDATE ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN OXFORDSHIRE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Education Scrutiny Committee had requested an update on the analysis of SEND and provision in Oxfordshire, together with the emerging strategy for implementing a transformative approach to supporting our children and young people with SEND.

The Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good introduced the report which updated members on progress of the actions undertaken since it had last been to Committee in September. The report recognised that they could not achieve the improvements

required without engaging a wider range of other stakeholders in the work they were doing, including early years providers, schools, colleges and parents.

She reported that Oxfordshire County Council SEND services were facing financial challenges as were many Local Authorities across the country, with growing expectations on essential services and increasing demand and complexity of needs of some of the most vulnerable residents. The current financial challenges however, provided opportunities to fundamentally rethink and transform the way that services were delivered, which would focus on developing a more inclusive approach to supporting children and young people with SEND.

The local area SEND inspection revisit in October 2019 had identified that there was still work to do as a partnership and stated that “Leaders had an aspirational vision for the work they were doing to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire. However, parents did not yet feel part of this vision and did not fully understand what work was being done to achieve it”.

There was a significant amount of work ongoing with the co-production Board and at an individual officer level with zoom meetings with the parent carer forum representatives, with over 60 parents having signed up, giving them an opportunity to raise questions.

They were also seeking to second an Oxfordshire Headteacher for an agreed period in order to lead the consultation and finalisation of the new SEND strategy with schools and settings. It was essential to use the opportunity to capture the realities of the schools setting and develop insight that could help them work with schools on supporting children with SEND.

In relation to engagement, Mrs Good reported that they were looking to improve communications by ensuring that the final Strategy sent out for consultation made clear the shared vision for the future and identified the major changes required, both in the short to medium term and over the next five years to bring about improved services for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire. The insight provided by the SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment was extremely helpful in order to ensure that the new SEND Strategy was aligned with the SEND sufficiency strategy and future joint commissioning arrangements. The next stage for the SEND Strategy would be an update which included input from schools. The draft would then be made available for public consultation early in 2021.

In relation to the wider SEND Transformation, they were developing a high need deficit recovery plan in order to achieve costs savings and the report highlighted some of the work being undertaken to achieve it. They now had a SEND Transformation Board, working in partnership to identify the solutions to the challenges and recognise the successes.

Looking at the number of out of County placements, there was a need to identify more locally available high-quality provision in the county, there was also a need to reduce the demand on placements. Currently, there were around 370 placements out of County at a cost of £19m per year. They also needed to look at their resource

bases and what needed to be done to enhance or compliment that provision to add to the capacity in the provision.

Since September, they had submitted an Accelerated Progress Plan to the Department for Education. The plan set out the actions which would be taken in order to address the identified areas of concern including communication with parents and careers and the timeliness of Education Health Care Plans. DfE specialist SEND advisers were in regular communication with officers and parent/carer representatives and were satisfied with the progress we have made to date. The DfE will formally monitor progress of the APP in February.

The Performance Board was co-chaired by the OCC Director of Children's Services and OCCG Director of Quality and Lead Nurse.

She highlighted the Transformation Priorities set out in paragraph 17 of the report.

In order to meet the growing deficit, the strategy focused on supporting learners closer to home. It was essential that they ensured that there was a sufficient supply of local, high quality mainstream, special school and resource bases which delivered good outcomes for children. This relied on revenue and capital investment to increase the amount and type of local special school provision and revenue funding for an increase in resource base places. If the additional funding resulted in fewer children/young people moving to more costly placements in out-of-county independent specialist provision, the investment would payback over time.

Additional leadership capacity had been implemented with a newly appointed permanent SEND Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager who took up post in September and a full-time finance officer to support the monitoring of cost of provision. A new permanent Head of SEND will be recruited at the earliest opportunity.

The Chairman queried how long the Council could carry the deficit on the high needs block. In response, Kevin Gordon explained that there was a national debate around how the deficit was accounted for; whether they were accounted for against the local authority budget, or against another budget. The last information received suggested that they were accounted for in neither of those places.

The Government had not given hard and fast guidance about when the deficit should be recovered but had put in place a rigorous reporting mechanism and an expectation that they had to submit a viable debt recovery programme to demonstrate how they were going to achieve it.

Councillor Matelot queried if there were children coming out of County into Oxfordshire. In response, Mrs Good explained that in theory they could but, they didn't in terms of their special schools as they were all full to capacity with Oxfordshire children. There were a couple of children near the border who attended Oxfordshire special schools, but this was because it was their nearest available school. There would be Independent specialist providers that would take children of County.

Councillor Matelot further queried why an officer from OCC had not attended an EHCP Annual Review Meeting even though they had been invited. Mrs Good explained that there was presently an issue with capacity of officers to attend all the Annual Review meetings, but that this was being addressed with additional resource within this area. They were aware that it was an issue and were working hard to address it.

Carole Thomson reported that she was aware of one case with the Secretary of State where the Council were fighting against a child coming from out of County to one of the special schools from across the border and welcomed the officers supporting the special schools for children in the County.

Councillor John Howson asked whether it would be possible to know what the extra cost was of EHCP to the central services in terms of preparation and ongoing cost of the annual review and monitoring. In relation to the presentation, he queried whether any work had been carried out in relation to the CPD needs to ensure that there was an adequately prepared workforce and whether some investment in CPD might reduce the number of EHCP required.

In response, Mrs Good reported that both areas were tied into two of the strands of the task and finish groups. The SEND sufficiency group were looking at the need for places and what the exact nature of those places were, and the need they had to meet, the SEND continuum group were looking at the CPD element and what support they needed to make available for them to better meet the needs of children and young people and to keep them in mainstream. The finance group were looking at whether it would be possible to make an additional payment to those mainstream schools so that they could keep some of the children going out of County.

Councillor Gill Sanders queried why there was a need to get a Headteacher in for a couple of days a week when there was a great deal of expertise within the Council that could take on that roll. She was shocked to hear that in the 1980's there was a campaign to get children out of county to in county queried why it was this taking so long.

Kevin Gordon agreed that it was sad that this was being discussed 40 year's ago. He believed that people had wanted to resolve the issue and knew the general direction of travel, but that it had lacked rigour and ownership and that had led into why they had taken on the Headteacher with local knowledge and experience. This would require fundamental change at every tier of the system.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Good for the report and welcomed the approach. The Chairman queried when the Scrutiny Committee could input into the process, but undertook to look at it under the work programme item.

The Education Scrutiny Committee AGREED to note developments to date since September 2020, in order to transform the provision of education, health and care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

31/20 VULNERABLE LEARNERS

(Agenda No. 6)

The Education Scrutiny Committee had requested to receive a presentation from the Head of the Virtual School on the Virtual school, celebrating children in care and their educational achievements. Accordingly, Michele Johnson attended the Committee to give a presentation (a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes) and share celebrations and reflections over the past year, including Covid.

Ms Johnson reported that although there was considerable concern around the effects of Covid to learning, for children that had been so anxious around attending school it had proved to have been a gift in many ways. She highlighted the positives from the year, including:

- Some of the highest exams results seen;
- A higher number of young people attending University;
- Lowest ever school exclusion rate;
- Post 16 results:
- GCSE resits English 30% (6%) Maths 19% (8%)
- 4 students - A-C A levels – all going to University
- 9 students - Distinction*-pass – 7 going to University, 1 apprenticeship, 1 full time work;
- 4 students Finished degrees/MAs – continuing studying;
- 4 students Finished foundation degrees, continuing to a degree at University;
- 2 Oxbridge offers;
- Primary University Programme – Magdalen College
- Training venues for teachers - trauma awareness in schools
- Mental Health and trauma research sharing with Heads and Chairs
- Exclusion agenda – Harry Daniels and Ian Thompson
- REES centre PGCE training, CiCC engagement
- Dr Alexy Karenowska – Physics – engineering competition over lockdown, magnetic challenge to be sent home – OKW challenges
- Dr Simon Smith – Brasenose College
- Ashmolean Museum kinship carer virtual art workshops during lockdown
- Oxford Brookes University pathway programme for KS3/4 pupils
- Virtual Reality feasibility study using immersive technologies with Oxford X-Reality Hub and Oxford University
- Issued laptops to children and care leavers in liaison with social workers
- Set up 1:1 tuition during lockdown for targeted KS4 pupils, EAL pupils and children working from home
- Continued with adapted COVID PEPs targeting access to learning
- Enabled mentoring and career profiling via WhatsApp
- Published fortnightly bulletins for DTs and Foster Carers
- Continued with applications for EHCPs/schools/admissions
- Continued with virtual training for DTs, foster carers and social workers
- Letterbox parcels for KS1&2, Dolly Parton Imagination Library for under 5s
- Extremely good attendance

- CiCC weekly catch ups to check in plus larger meetings via TEAMS
- Oxfordshire Kindness Wave – creative challenges, holding in mind parcels, art materials, residential home creative packs, online Friday tea-time art clubs, Horrid Henry back to school video messages/letters to children, house-warming gifts for YPSA new homes.

The Committee thanked Ms Johnson for her excellent presentation and requested that she pass on the Committee's thanks and congratulations to all staff at the school and paid tribute to the fact that the school had grasped the opportunities presented by living in a County with two universities.

32/20 TEACHER TRAINING RECRUITMENT

(Agenda No. 7)

The Education Scrutiny Committee had requested to receive a verbal report from Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance on recruitment onto initial teacher training placements and the capacity of the workforce. Accordingly, Mr Patrick Garton, SCITT Director of the Teaching School attended the Meeting to update the Committee on the Current situation.

Mr Garton reported that he had talked to colleagues at Brooks University and Oxford University regarding ITT Capacity this year and the general message coming back was that they seemed to be making things work this year. In May and June this year, following lockdown he had been very worried about how things were going to work. Some of the trainees last year continued in their placements full time and some continued to contribute significantly with on-line work.

Shifting to the online world mid-way through the year was a bit easier than setting up a whole new year in that context. By the time they had got to the end of their recruitment cycle in June, they had managed to make things work with around 115 trainees this year on new programmes, and a group of around 20 on part-time programmes who had started in the last academic year, so they found enough places to work. This had been the same at Oxford Brooks and Oxford University as well. To an extent they were in competition with the 2 universities for placements as they were the three significant providers of ITT within the County.

He further reported that around 90% of those that had trained with them had stayed in Oxfordshire, which compared to 25 – 30% of the other two providers, so one of the reasons they always tried to get high quality placements was because it translated in 9 out of 10 situations to people joining state schools in Oxfordshire as newly qualified teachers (NQT) and that was the case this year even for those, given the turbulence of the Summer Term. They had 2 or 3 who had trained with them last year and hadn't taken teaching jobs yet, but around 85% were NQTs this year.

At the same time last year, they were still in the depths of a recruitment crisis and for many years there had been a crisis in terms of quality, quantity and location, and location as a factor in Oxfordshire was of particular concern. What they were now beginning to see as they looked ahead, was that capacity would be a major challenge in the system. At the moment, this year they were just about making things work, although on a daily basis they were hearing of trainees and their mentors and colleagues in schools and year group bubbles who were having to self-isolate, so it

was continuing to be a very patchy picture and it was proving difficult to ensure that the best provision was distributed equitably across all the trainees.

The Department of Education had relaxed some of their ITT criteria and legislation, in an attempt to make things a little bit smoother. It was too early to know how significant an impact the context of the year was going to have on those who were training, but they were having to be very flexible with their expectations of schools in order to keep things going.

In terms of the recruitment crisis, they were beginning to see a significant increase in applications for ITT programmes, starting from the Summer Term. Due to the fact that they stopped their recruitment early as they started their programmes before the Summer Holiday, the wave had not landed with them for the current cohort, but given that UCAS had only been open for a matter of weeks, they were already seeing a significant increase in applications for next year's programme.

There was a National increase, although it was difficult to see at this stage whether that increase in applications would be distributed equally across the Country, at the moment it did not look like it was, this was dependent on the economy and there would also be some local factors.

There was a useful report from the National Foundation of Education Research issued in September which looked at the impact of Covid on ITT, which had identified that schools had withdrawn placements or that capacity had been taken out of the system, slightly bigger numbers withdrawing at Primary level (20%) and Secondary (10%) at National level. Another concerning thread they identified was that those schools withdrawing the offer of placements were schools with a higher percent of Free Schools Meals, so therefore schools in challenging areas, which was an area they were highly alert to, as they knew that involvement in ITT and supply of high quality recruits into the schools, could boost it in terms of its capacity and staffing structure.

In terms of mentoring Capacity, one of the things that was being rolled out for September 2021, was the Governments early career framework, which was a very welcome initiative, in that it gave an enhanced level of support and training, not just for NQTs but for NQTs 1 (teachers in their first year) and which was aligned to the core content framework which was the new framework ITT providers were working with. There was some concern that if they were providing Mentors at the moment for NQTs and trainees and then from next September we are also providing mentors for the third year, that would stretch mentoring capacity in Oxfordshire schools further, so it might be that they found more schools saying that if they had to find mentors for NQTs and NQTs 1, then they were not able to support trainees.

The other part of the increase in applications was that it was a mixed blessing, as although they needed more applicants to apply (last year being the worst in a decade for applications), people applying did not just solve that. Firstly, it was important to ensure that they had the right kind of people applying, they also had to consider retention of those people over time and whether they had enough capacity in the system to support those people and bring them in and give them the right preparation at the start of their career so that they were more likely to stay. He was alert to all of the possible challenges coming forward.

Councillor Howson noted that current vacancies in Oxfordshire stood at around 16% down from what they were in 2018, and that by the end of the year that would probably be 10%, mostly in the state secondary sector.

He expressed concern over what the universities were doing in relation to the end of term and queried whether students on teacher placements would get an exemption in the same way as nursing to enable them to complete those, rather than being sent home with all other under graduates, because firstly they were not under graduates in some cases and secondly the number of weeks they were expected to spend in schools.

He asked if Patrick that given that there was quite significant growth in the school growth population, particularly secondary, whether or not he believed there was a sufficient spread across the whole range of the curriculum in terms of our ability to provide teacher preparation and if there was any more that could be done across the universities and SCITT to ensure there would not be a deficit to the detriment of the young people going forward.

Mr Garton reported that the issue was being looked at by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers were looking at the issue and had lobbied the DfE about the Christmas closures and something was due to be published today.

Last year there was a very mixed picture across the system, lots of people were very alert to maximising the amount of time people get in schools, and for newly qualified teachers this year, they were running an enhanced scheme for NQT who were training with them and he was aware of other organisations doing the same. The legacy of that would take some time to come through the system.

In terms of how long the gold rush would last, he commented that in terms of the economic cycle and how quickly they would bounce back, was that they could not ignore that Oxford was one of the most expensive cities to live in and that would always have a bearing on their ability to bring people to Oxford to train and then retain those people further down the line.

The data from last academic year showed that only about 50% of the national teacher supply model were met in subjects like DT and physics. He did not know if the current economic crisis would have an impact on areas such as the sciences, maths and computer studies which were already the greatest shortage areas. They were working on supporting career changes and were always on the lookout for the shortage areas.

Hayley Good forwarded information to the Committee from the DfE regarding holiday arrangements for ITT students.

Donald McEwan commented that union representatives would be very supportive of NQTs colleagues if they were having any difficulty accessing the enhanced training SHITT were providing with the restrictions of lockdown impacting on their school placements. With 8% of the workforce out due to Covid it was very important to encourage NQTs to access the provision.

Councillor Howson commented that the other area of concern was burnout amongst school leaders and that the Committee would be monitoring the situation, as heads

had not had a day off since lockdown one. Mr Garton commented that he was also aware of that concern.

The Committee thanked Mr Garton for his very informative presentation.

33/20 ADMISSION SCHEME

(Agenda No. 8)

The Education Scrutiny Committee had requested to receive a verbal update from the Head of Access to Learning on fair access and referrals to the Secretary of State. Accordingly, Allyson Milward attended the Committee to update it on progress of the fair access processes.

Mrs Milward gave an update of the fair access processes and how they were working currently since the last time the Committee had looked at the issue last Autumn. She reported that since last autumn, the team had been introducing rigorous procedures in referring youngsters in the in-year application system who had not been placed within 15 school days within logging an application for a place. They were now (if they could not be placed) being referred straight to the panels. The business was going to the in-year fair access panels alongside those who had been excluded and were looking for an alternative school place.

Youngsters were being identified if they were not moving into the school system quickly enough, which had meant that there had been a huge increase of business going to the panels, so they were looking at how that was being administered. At the moment that was being administered well, North/West Central panels were working co-operatively together to place the youngsters, (there were always cases that needed more investigation than others) but mostly they had got numbers coming through in the Oxford and Bicester areas which was just sheer volume in trying to place youngsters where they hadn't got the on published numbers the number of places to offer them.

Work had been carried out to identify those trends and they had not had to make any referrals of the SFA this term, but it did take longer to place a youngsters that had been excluded than ones that was coming through with an application for a place because they had not here for the main rounds. They were now getting ready to do the annual consultation on the in-year fair access protocol which would look at some administrative changes to help those panels deal with the volume of work coming their way, so they could get even better at shifting the business.

They were also setting themselves up to deal with the anticipated changes to the school admissions code in the next academic year. The Secretary of State had consulted on some changes this Autumn though the outcome was not yet known. In this area, the main change was that was a requirement that youngsters would have to be placed within ten days of applying for a place in-year and that requirement would fall upon the co-ordinating authority which was usually this Council, but also on the admission authorities and it was going to be a challenge to meet that target. She believed they should be achieving it, but this could require a further look at the fair access protocol next Autumn.

The Chairman commented that those who were members on the school's stakeholder were aware of the proposals that were currently out. He questioned that given that the proposals were there, and schools were aware of them whether they were seeing any positive change in attitudes from academies that had not been very co-operative so far with their partner schools.

Ms Milward answered that there were still definite trends, but that she was hopeful that the very recent changes at leadership level might make a difference to some areas. There were still differences on how panels dealt with their business, which was how it was designed to be flexible to local needs, but some were more coaligent in their approach than others. This was becoming better logged over time and allowed for discussions on what the role of the panel was.

Councillor Gill Sanders commented that she aware of certain schools who were reluctant to take on students who had been excluded and that there were other schools who took on more than their fair share. Ofsted had undertaken to investigate it at their last meeting with the Council.

Carole Thomson queried how the situation in Primary schools was going. Ms Milward reported that the primary situation was working well and that it did not have the quantity that secondary had, they were dealt with separately and that was working well currently.

Donald McEwan commented that colleagues in schools would aspire to make a placement within ten days. With children returning to a new school following exclusion, the delay was often caused by having to get a risk assessment in place or support staff employed or redeployed to ensure that when a formally excluded pupil is brought into a new school that the new placement is a success. If staff knew a particular cohort had a large number of SEN, it could account for the disparity of accepting formally excluded pupils.

Councillor Gill Sanders commented that she knew that one of the issues was that some school preferred to exclude pupils rather than put the correct infrastructure in to deal with the pupil.

Deborah Bell reported that the key was successful transition planning. Therefore, by starting early when the child is still at alternative provision following an exclusion to understand the exact issues at the receiving second school was, they key to preventing anxiety and disruption to the school leaders and to ensuring a successful transition for the youngsters. The Chairman queried whether schools were getting better at that? Deborah Bell reported that in the main, there were some that were brilliant and some that were still working on it. They were being supported and prompted in terms of that careful transition planning by the County.

The Chairman queried how they were able to encourage schools. Deborah Bell explained that they were tracking the children until they were back into the second school and if there was any delay, they were asking the difficult questions.

The Committee thanked Mrs Milward for her update and welcomed the rigorous process introduced to reduce the length of time for placing a child.

34/20 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee considered the forward plan and **AGREED** the business for February 2021 as set out in the report and that the Chairman and Vice Chairman, together with officers would manage the business on the current work programme for the efficient running of the Committee.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing