



Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2021 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 3.30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

K Bates, P Birchley, D Blamires, M Dormer, S Kayani, R Matthews, A Osibogun and D Summers

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jones, R Nash, Mr S James, G Drawmer and E Biggs

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Collingwood, Gaster, Jones and Turner.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Matthews – School Governor and Volunteer at a Charity "Transitions UK"

Councillor Bates – Chair of Governors

Councillor Kayani – On the Senior Leadership Team of Bourne End Academy and Chair of the Dyspraxia Foundation

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th June were reviewed.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Select Committee meeting held on 24th June be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman noted the following:

- (i) Corporate Parenting training would be available on 10th September and that all Councillors were welcome to attend.
- (ii) An agenda working group had been held prior to this committee meeting to have an initial discussion around the items being reported to this meeting.
- (iii) That invitations had been extended to the Catholic and Church of England diocese for a representative from each to become co-optees on this committee. The Chairman also noted that the process of inviting nominations for parent governor co-optees from

the primary, secondary and special school sectors was underway.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 EMOTIONAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Councillor Birchley welcomed the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services, Mrs Anita Cranmer, Mr Richard Nash, Corporate Director for Children's Services, Mr Simon James, Service Director, Education and Mr Gareth Drawmer, Head of Achievement and Learning to the meeting. In addition they were joined by Dr Tim James, Principal Psychologist and Ms Elizabeth Biggs, Public Health Principal.

Councillor Cranmer thanked the Select Committee for bringing this report on emotional health in schools to the committee, noting that this was an extremely important subject particularly as it had been made more critical by the Covid-19 pandemic. This report focussed on the work undertaken by schools but it was noted that many agencies contributed to the emotional support of children.

There had been many challenges for Buckinghamshire children during the lockdown periods, and as restrictions were lifted it was hoped that children would return to more normality. Work to support children during the pandemic had been both broad and extensive. Having time away from school was noted to be detrimental to children and the service had put in place a wide range of programmes to assist children.

Richard Nash thanked Elizabeth Biggs, Gareth Drawmer and Dr Tim James for their work. It was noted that the service had been pro-active in their support of schools during the pandemic.

Simon James considered the work in schools and with partner agencies to meet the educational and emotional needs of children in schools. Both current and future work was detailed. The pandemic had led to new issues and made existing issues worse. 1 in 6 children has had emotional issues, exacerbated by school closures. Mr James outlined the current range of support programmes for schools including mental health support teams, provision of senior mental health leads, a robust return to school programme, the Anna Freud Centre link programme, and in-school training. It was noted that specific support to schools had been provided with regards to managing critical incidents. A new group has been set up to co-ordinate this support activity with four areas of focus; evidence based, work monitored, right support at the right time and evaluation of all new programmes. The outcomes of this work were outlined including how to refer to agencies, pupils provided with early support and staff support for own emotional needs.

In response to a question, Simon James noted that during the pandemic the partnership with schools had strengthened and the work detailed in the report would be for the longer term. The emotional health agenda was now mainstream and prioritised in schools. Dr Jones noted that communication links with schools which were initiated during the pandemic had aided the implementation of programmes such as senior leads for mental health in schools which would be rolled out nationally and continued at a strategic level. School liaison groups now had a framework which would continue to be used.

Simon James noted that needs analysis information was reported into the department, and live intelligence was gained weekly from both headteachers and the liaison groups and these elements aided targeting support work. One key area was that of transitions; both coming into school from early years settings and moving into year 7.

In relation to closures, public health advice would be sought in the first instance, followed by work with schools. This built on the bank of learning from the different lockdown periods. All schools had contingency plans in place. The laptop programme had been rolled out successfully to those that were most in need and would continue to do so should working from home become necessary again.

In response to transitions, Simon James noted that there are additional needs if a child transitions into a school mid-year. Extra help was offered to these children such as catch up groups or professional help. Early years providers had reported some differences to play behaviour, delays in being ready for school and differences based on parental capacity during lockdown. Schools were adapting their early years curriculum to ensure that the children moved through the curriculum in the most appropriate way.

Richard Nash noted the impact of Covid-19 on teachers and school staff and that their work had changed dramatically. Support for staff was focused for the first time on headteachers with each headteacher offered specific support. Various opportunities were in place for headteachers to gain coaching and share information. Well-being return had focussed on teacher well-being as well as pupil wellbeing. The “Early Career” teacher programme now gave two years for additional time outside the classroom to support their development as opposed to one year offered previously. Headteacher huddles enabled the essential sharing of information between different headteachers. In addition, a wellbeing helpline had been set up for school leaders with an offer of coaching on a half-termly basis.

Families could choose to access other agencies as appropriate, often via health services. The family support service was noted to be part of the early help offer for families identified by professionals. Every family would be linked into health and education services; many factors determined how and which services they could access.

Action: The Chairman requested that details of the Oxwell survey could be reported back to the committee. Liz Biggs noted that this was the second year this had been undertaken, with 5,000 pupils completing it this year.

It was RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Chairman write a letter to all schools in Buckinghamshire to thank their staff for their excellent dedication to their work during the pandemic to support pupils.
- (ii) Councillors who act as school governors, become involved in supporting the emotional wellbeing agenda in schools and
- (iii) A letter requesting clarity with regards to the exam process for schools in 2022 be sent to Nadhim Zahawi MP at the Department of Education.

The Chairman thanked all the Officers for their extensive work in supporting the pupils of the county.

6 CLOSING THE ATTAINMENT GAP IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The Chairman noted that Buckinghamshire was known for its high standards of education but

closing the attainment gap for those disadvantaged was a priority for the service.

Councillor Cranmer reported this was a long-standing issue, and that the Covid pandemic had made the situation worse. The report gave details of the size of the gap in the different age groups and the actions being taken to close it. The strengthening of the partnership working between schools and the council during the pandemic was very positive. The service would continue to support schools to help children achieve their potential.

Richard Nash noted that the report highlights that the service is in a good place to narrow the gap. The Buckinghamshire Challenge Board noted that the council has been working on reducing the gap for several years.

Simon James reported that the focus was on the attainment gap between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in Buckinghamshire over the assessed points of key stage 2, GCSE stage and early years. Data was available up to 2019 and some indicative data was available for 2020. Headteachers and local authority officers and were working well collaboratively on the Buckinghamshire Challenge Board. The board had agreed five evidence-based approaches to target work to the most in-need pupils, focussing on inclusive teaching, issue assessment and the evaluation of intervention. Five outcomes were focussed on namely; the maintenance of the gap from 2019, a target of at least 90 % of schools to access training, 100% of schools to access to focus sessions, aiming for a reduction in the gap of ½% by 2023 across all age groups and to support schools further over the next few years.

The gap slightly narrows as children become older, illustrating how interventions benefit the children.

In response to a question, it was noted that school attendance was good across the pandemic and where attendance is lower than should be, the attendance team are on hand to encourage parents to return children to school. Schools are keen to persist in getting the children in school. There are 101 children who are electively home schooled in the county.

Gareth Drawmer noted the teams on-going hard work to increase attendance. Many schools develop their own resources. Sanctions are in place if required. The team worked closely with the Department of Education for example on the issue of children who went abroad last March and have not returned to school here as yet.

A Member enquired as to how the department directs attention to those more highly disadvantaged and it was noted that the definition of disadvantaged was those looked after by the local authority, those adopted and those accessing free school meals. 38% of children were in the BME category and 18% were children whose first language was not English. The latter can access extra support for the language issue.

Focus schools were defined by three criteria across the range of schools. The “Quality First Teaching” programme aimed to empower teachers to be the best they could. It also assessed children holistically and reassessed them further on. Another part of the work was around regulated self-learning. A teaching school hub was run by Dr Challoners with responsibility to increase standards across the system. As a result of the good partnership working with schools, communication had increased and best practice was shared.

Action: to bring information back to committee on how the Quality First Project is working as part of the data set on the Education Standards report.

A significant training offer was being made with the Education Endowment Foundation. The main focus was on delivering the best quality teaching in the classroom. Many conferences had been run over the last year online with high attendance levels. These included looking at peer-to

-peer working and best practice.

The Chairman thanked the Officers and requested a report back to committee on the work of the Buckinghamshire Challenge Board and for those on universal funding and work of Dr Challenors.

7 WORK PROGRAMME 2021-2022

The Senior Scrutiny Officer introduced the Select Committee's work programme for the forthcoming year.

It was noted that a piece of work could be chosen for a more in-depth investigation, via either a rapid review group or a more in-depth inquiry.

Suggestions for further in-depth work would be taken into consideration in due course. It was noted that the deadline for receiving public questions to the committee was the day upon which the agenda was published. It was suggested that the work programme should be attached to the published minutes to enable the public to have an opportunity to see which items would come to which meeting.

The outcomes of the SEND consultation would be reported back to the November committee. A member of FACT Bucks could be invited to the committee to illustrate the parents' position within this agenda.

The Chairman requested that committee members come back to herself and the Senior Scrutiny Officer with any other ideas.

RESOLVED that

(i) the recruitment and retention of social workers could be the subject of a rapid review group and

(ii) The Educations Standards report would be added to the forward work programme and would include feedback from the Buckinghamshire Challenge Board.

8 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Select Committee would be Thursday 11th November 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN