

Overview and Scrutiny Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2010

Present:

Councillor Cox - In the Chair
Councillors Fisher, Keller, Parkinson, Tavernor
Mr. D. Arnold

Professor Mel Ainscow, Manchester University,
Sarah Henry, Head of Research and Intelligence
Wendy Middlemas, Head of Education Services
Eleanor Fort, Scrutiny Support Officer
Carolyn Whewell, Scrutiny Support Officer

Apologies:

Councillor Judge

CYP/OSG/10/01 Minutes

Decision:

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2009 as a correct record.

CYP/OSG/10/02 Presentation: Attainment Best Practice

The subgroup welcomed Professor Mel Ainscow from Manchester University. Professor Ainscow made a presentation on lessons learned from research into raising attainment in urban schools.

The Manchester research was based on a number of qualitative 'up-close' studies of practice, and evaluations of particular initiatives. The presentation was based around four key themes, which were:

1. From stuck to moving schools
2. School-to-school networking
3. System Change
4. Moving Knowledge Around

Theme 1: From stuck to moving schools

This particular study focused on the patterns and trends identified from a number of secondary schools, where they had managed to demonstrate a sustained improvement to attainment levels for four out of six years. The key lessons learned from this research were: to focus on changing the expectations and attitudes in the school, to use data to support change and to be consistent with routines. Professor Ainscow also emphasised the importance of a strong leadership and a persistent approach to change.

Theme 2: School-to-school networking

This study focused on a number of schools working together under a range of national initiatives. The study evaluated six urban school networks. Some of the key lessons learned from this piece of research were: a sense of collective responsibility for bringing about improvements in all the partner organisations, senior staff in schools willing to drive collaboration forward.

Theme 3: System Change

This study included a summary of best practice and themes identified in reviews undertaken as part of this project. The studies had each shown that individual schools can, and have improved but this was usually at the expense of other schools in the area. This demonstrated the need for system wide change with all parties committed and involved. Some of the key elements of this were; strengthening collaboration within and between institutions, taking an evidence based approach and strong leadership based on the principle of shared responsibility. Professor Ainscow also emphasised the need for the Local Authority to take on a co-ordinating role to facilitate changes across the whole education system.

Theme 4: Moving Knowledge Around

This study was a three-year improvement programme aimed at raising educational outcomes for children and young people, with a particular focus on narrowing the gap in achievement, between learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. The lessons learned from this study included the need to strengthen capacity of the education system to include all learners, effective networking and ensuring Headteachers and other school leaders acted as they key agents for leading change.

Professor Ainscow stressed that the most important lesson learned from all of the research was that it was necessary for all partners including teachers, parents, learners, leaders and the local authority to commit to change to improve attainment. Following the presentation, the Chair invited members of the subgroup to ask questions.

The subgroup felt that schools should provide a safe and fun learning environment for children, to encourage them to participate fully in lessons. They also felt that school should be somewhere that children wanted to be, and asked whether any of research had been done to ascertain the views of children and young people. Professor Ainscow agreed that schools should provide a safe and fun learning environment and noted that a number of national strategies had restricted innovation to apply creative teaching techniques. The Government had recently published a white paper entitled "Twenty First Century Schools" which gave local authorities more freedom to find local solutions to resolve issues.

Professor Ainscow added that there were a number of good examples of where research had been done with young people. Calderdale Research Network, one of the case studies used in the research from Manchester University had its own student research network where they had done some work on equity in schools. The

research had been designed and carried out by the students. The Head of Research and Intelligence informed the subgroup that there were some good examples of where the Council had carried out research with children and young people and gave examples of where children had been involved in the design of schools.

The subgroup referred to the Academies and the specialist subject areas offered across the academies in Manchester. While this was acknowledged as an excellent opportunity for learners to develop skills in one area, members felt that there was a lack of choice for some residents in certain areas of the city to attend the academy with their chosen specialism if it was based in a different locality.

Members discussed the importance of transforming the expectations of pupils and how this could be done. A member asked about how the case study schools within the research had managed resistance to change. Professor Ainscow informed members that there were always some examples of schools that were resistant to change and he referred to the examples in the “stuck” theme of the research. He noted that it was necessary to involve all stakeholders to encourage change but it was particularly important to have a strong figurehead within a cluster of schools to lead the change process and influence the leaders within schools that were resistant to change. He referred to Parklands Federation School, which had moved from “special measures” to a “good” school largely as a result of a strong influential leader. A member of the subgroup added that it was also important to involve parents in transforming the expectations of children and young people, particularly in the early stages of their education. Members also stressed the need for Head Teachers to operate within a system of clear accountability and for this to be provided by proactive governing bodies.

A member commented that attendance had been identified as an area, which required significant improvement within the Children’s Services Business Plan. The Head of Education Services, Leadership and Learning informed the Committee that the Attendance Strategy set out a persistent and coordinated approach for dealing with attendance across schools in Manchester. Members felt that there was a strong link between attendance and attainment, and there was a need to raise the long term expectations of young people to address both these issues.

Professor Ainscow informed members that there was a need to ensure that there was a strong governance assurance framework in place to ensure that schools were supported to tackle attendance and attainment issues. He mentioned that some representatives from the university research team wanted to serve as school governors in Manchester schools. The Chair noted that university representatives would provide a valuable contribution to school governance and thanked Professor Ainscow for the information.

Members asked whether there was any research, which tracked young people after they had left school. The Head of Research and Intelligence informed members that there was no systematic means of measuring the destination of school leavers, although some schools did do some of their own research. The subgroup asked the head of Research and Intelligence to look into whether existing data sources could provide some of this information in more detail.

The subgroup discussed how schools could improve links with the local community. A member referred to an example of one school, which worked with local organisations such as pubs and community centres. Professor Ainscow said that the research had looked at several examples of sponsored schools, where large organisations, such as the Coop sponsored activities with local communities and schools. He added that a city as large as Manchester was well placed to take advantage of these opportunities.

In summary, the Chair invited members of the subgroup to identify one element of the research which summarised the lessons learned from research into raising attainment in schools. Members noted that the key lessons learned were:

- A need to transform the aspirations and attitudes of learners
- A need to provide equal access to high quality education for all learners
- To develop a role for schools within the local community
- To involve parents in the education of their children.
- To ensure effective use of power to influence and motivate change
- The need for a persistent and coordinated approach to tackling attendance and attainment.
- The need for strong governance arrangements.

Decision:

1. To thank Professor Ainscow for attending the subgroup and for the presentation.
2. To ask the Head of Research and Intelligence to explore whether existing data sources could provide information about the destination of school leavers.
3. To note that that representatives from the Manchester University research team wanted to serve as school governors in Manchester schools.
4. To agree to hold an additional meeting of the Ofsted Subgroup before the end of the municipal year to look at:
 - Attendance
 - To look at the work being done to raise attainment in schools and whether any lessons from the Manchester University research could be applied across Manchester.
 - To look at governance of school, in particular to look at the issues raised at the meeting of the subgroup in October 2009.

CYP/OSG/10/03 Ofsted Reports

The Subgroup commented on a range of recent Ofsted reports:

Armitage C of E Primary School

The school was inspected on 6-7 October 2009 and received an overall grading by Ofsted of “good”.

Members commended the “good” grade awarded to the school. They were particularly impressed with the grade awarded for the Early Years Foundation stage and for the Leadership and Management of the school. There were particular elements of good practice around the quality of care, guidance and support in supporting pupil attainment. The subgroup felt that the Headteacher and the Governors of the school should be congratulated for this achievement.

Members were also impressed with the Governors understanding and involvement with the work of the school. The school governors were aware of the schools main strengths and weaknesses and took their responsibilities seriously. The issue of recruiting and retaining governors had been raised by the subgroup at a previous meeting where members were concerned that more needed to be done to support governors in their role. The issue of recruitment, training and support offered to governors would be explored in more detail by the subgroup at its next meeting.

The subgroup were concerned that ‘satisfactory’ grade for attendance was not consistent with the rest of the school grades, although they acknowledged that this was not unique to Armitage C of E Primary School in Manchester. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee had referred attendance as an issue for consideration by the Ofsted subgroup at their last meeting and this would be considered at the next meeting.

The Head of Education, Children’s Services noted that the Council had rated the attendance at the school as unsatisfactory in their pre Ofsted judgement. The aim of this was to reinforce the point that attendance needed to be improved across Manchester schools and that this remained a priority of the Council. Members stressed that this message needed to be offered in a way that did not discourage the progress that was being made in other areas of school life.

Cheetham C of E Community School, Cheetham Hill

The school was inspected on 28-29 September 2009 and was awarded an overall grade of ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted.

The subgroup was very impressed with the overall score and quality of the school. The Head of Education said that the Council had little input into the quality assurance of this school as it was well run.

Members praised the school for their outstanding leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage and their proactive approach to gathering information about pupils prior to entry. Members noted that the school achieved a satisfactory rating for attainment but acknowledged the high number of pupils with English as a second language. Pupils entering the early Years Foundation Stage were below typical age related expectations, particularly in their language skills. Members felt that the achievement in attainment was largely due to the outstanding support of staff and governors to raise the aspirations of pupils at the school.

The subgroup noted that the school contained many elements of best practice that could be applied to other schools in Manchester. The Head Teacher, staff and governors should all be congratulated on making the school a success.

St Peter's High School, Gorton

The school was inspected on 19-20 November 2009 and was awarded an overall grade of 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Members commended the 'outstanding' grade and felt that this was well deserved. They were particularly impressed with the inclusiveness of the school, commenting on the excellent quality of the partnerships, whole family approach, and leadership and management. The Head Teacher was praised for taking an individual approach to every child. The value of this approach was recognised by both the parents and pupils of the school.

The subgroup congratulated the school in achieving a 'good' grading for attendance, observing that this was above average compared to other schools in Manchester. Members felt that there could be some lessons learned about how to tackle attendance from the example set at St Peter's RC High School.

Whalley Range High School

The school was inspected on 4-5 November 2009 and was awarded an overall grade of 'satisfactory' by Ofsted.

The Head of Education, Children's Services informed members that the school had made excellent progress within a short space of time. Several months prior to the inspection, it had been anticipated that the school would have been awarded a lower grade but the Head Teacher had a strong focus on improvement, making a significant difference to the school over the last few months. Members noted that attainment had declined between 2008 and 2009 but it was likely to improve significantly for 2010 as a result of the improvements that had been made.

The subgroup was advised that the safeguarding procedure was an example of best practice and had been applied in other schools in Manchester. Members commended the safeguarding arrangements and felt that the school should be congratulated for this.

The Ofsted report stated that the school's view of the quality of teaching and learning was too generous. The school was looking to agree a way forward to address the quality of teaching with the City Council.

Decision:

1. To agree to write to the Headteachers of the four schools that the Subgroup has looked at today conveying members' views.

2. To request that a report be provided to the next meeting of the subgroup on the recruitment, selection and training of, and support to, governors with a view to identifying and spreading good practice.

CYP/OSG/10/04 Work Programme

The Subgroup's work programme was submitted.

Decision:

1. To request that an additional meeting of the subgroup is arranged for March 2010 to consider attainment, attendance and governance.
2. To agree the work programme of the Ofsted Subgroup.