

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny – Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2010

Present:

Councillor Carmody – in the Chair
Councillors Chamberlain, H Fisher, Tavernor

Councillor S Newman – Executive Member for Children’s Services

Apologies:

Councillors Reeves and Reid
David Arnold

CYP/OSG/10/09 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2010 were submitted to the Subgroup for consideration.

In the meeting the Subgroup had looked at the levels of attendance of children in Manchester’s schools, and members asked if there was any evidence of the improvements that were discussed. The Executive Member for Children’s Services informed the Subgroup that 30 000 children had improved their attendance. The Head of Education Services told the Subgroup that Manchester had raised the levels of school attendance so that it was no longer had the lowest level of attendance in England, and attendance at primary level was only 0.05% below the national average.

Decision:

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2010 as a correct record.

CYP/OSG/10/10 Overview of Ofsted Judgements

The Subgroup considered the reports submitted by the Head of Education Services – Commissioning which gave an overview of the current status of Ofsted judgements to schools in Manchester. The information submitted was as follows:

- An overview of the Ofsted judgements that had taken place since the January 2010, which is when the Subgroup last considered Ofsted reports.
- A summary of the current Ofsted judgements for all schools across Manchester.
- A calendar of Ofsted visits and outcomes from September 2006 to July 2010.
- A summary of all current Ofsted inspection grades.

The Head of Education Services gave the Subgroup some background information on Ofsted inspections in Manchester. She explained the judgements became more stringent in September 2009, and Manchester had fared well under the new

framework. There were currently four schools in special measures and all were making the necessary improvements to improve.

A member was disappointed that St Patrick's Primary School's progress since being put in special measures was still only 'inadequate'. The Head of Education Services said that there had been a recent improvement. The leadership and governance of the school had improved with the appointment of an interim headteacher. This interim position had been filled by a School Effectiveness Officer (SEO) working for the Council, so the appointment has not incurred additional cost. The appointment has allowed for more time to find a good headteacher to fill the post permanently. St Patrick's Primary School were making the improvements necessary to be taken out of special measures.

The Subgroup discussed how the way schools were working together would improve Ofsted inspections. Members were concerned that if working together in clusters remained optional, some schools would be left behind. The Head of Education Services said Children's Services were conscious of this risk, especially with small primary schools, but some do opt out and they were increasingly asking School Improvement Partnerships (SIPs) to judge whether this was acceptable. The Executive Member for Children's Services acknowledged this risk, but explained that schools are working together in many different ways, for example, some had very informal partnerships, working together on small projects.

Members were concerned about the lack of good headteachers, and agreed that one way to address this was to have a single headteacher for one or more schools in partnership. A member said part of the problem was that so few people wanted to be headteachers and it was seen as an isolated job. The Subgroup agreed that there was sometimes a parochial attitude on the part of the school and its governing body, which was a challenge and could cause problems. The Head of Education Services informed the Subgroup that the move from being a headteacher of a single school to one of a cluster of schools working in strong partnership could be seen as career progression, which might make it a more attractive option.

The Head of Education Services told the Subgroup that Manchester had improved on intervening in schools when necessary and had developed a track record of identifying schools which needed action early on, and often intervened prior to Ofsted judgements. The Department for Education was no longer concerned with the city as a whole, and in fact now looked to Manchester for some best practice. A member asked whether this would result in loss of funds, and therefore be counter productive, but the Head of Education Services reassured her that the levels of deprivation in the city meant that it would continue to be a focus for funding, depending on outcomes of government spending review.

The Subgroup discussed which Ofsted inspection reports to consider at the next meeting. Members agreed they wanted to look at the reports of a range of schools with diverse results and challenges. The Subgroup agreed to request the following:

- St Patrick's Primary School;
- Mount Carmel Primary School, which was rated outstanding;
- Newall Green High School, the first to be inspected under the new framework;

- Trinity High School, whose Survey Inspection on Health Eating had rated the school's healthy eating programme as inadequate;
- Sandilands Primary School, which had been in Notice to Improve in 2009 but was rated as good in 2010.

The Subgroup discussed how schools were rated under the safeguarding framework. Members were concerned that the requirements were too stringent. The Head of Education Services agreed that the change to the Ofsted framework had initially been very severe, but this had improved and they had come to understand that schools could protect children without excessive security. Schools were required to have a list of up to date CRB checks for all staff, and if this could not be produced the school would rightly fail.

A member asked why all the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were only rated as satisfactory. The Head of Education Services said that, although Manchester always strived for good or better, this was misleading, and that a 'satisfactory' for PRUs compared favourably with outcomes nationally. The Key Stage 2 PRU had been rated 'good', and the drop was due to the new Ofsted framework. Attendance was often a challenge for PRUs, and Ofsted judged them strictly. The Executive Member for Children's Services gave the example of a teacher being criticised for praising a girl whose attendance was 80%, which was low, when she had improved from 30%. Member agreed that context was crucial to judge fairly.

Decision:

To request that the Subgroup receive the following inspection reports for consideration at the meeting on 2 December 2010:

- St Patrick's Primary School
- Mount Carmel Primary School
- Newell Green High School
- Trinity High School – Survey Inspection on Health Eating
- Sandilands Primary School

CYP/OSG/10/11 Schools of Concern

The Head of Education Services submitted a confidential report to the Subgroup, which listed the schools currently of concern in Manchester. There are two levels of concern: intensive, schools for which significant intervention is recommended, and critical, schools for which a structural solution is recommended. The intervention measures escalate from holding a progress meeting, to issuing a formal warning to the governing body and to the removal of delegated powers. An interim executive board may then be put in place. Manchester has an unusually high number of schools with interim executive boards, but it has not yet been necessary to close a school. The number of schools which were causing concern had fallen from 45 eight months ago to 10.

The Head of Education Services explained that the schools on the list were all in the early stages of this escalating process because it is the intention that schools of concern are identified as early as possible and measures are implemented by the school that mean the school is no longer of concern.

The Greater Manchester challenge is a programme working in partnership with Manchester to improve educational outcomes for young people in Greater Manchester, running from 2008 to 2011 and was in agreement that Manchester LA was working in the right way to make improvements.

The Executive Member for Children's Services explained that one of the challenges for a minority of secondary schools was that one of the changes in the inspection framework was from counting the percentage attaining 5 GCSEs at grades A-C, to counting the percentage attaining 5 GCSEs at A-C including English and Maths. This had revealed areas to strengthen in schools which had not necessarily been evident before. For example, some schools were encouraging pupils to study a GNVQ, equivalent to 4 GCSEs, plus one other GCSE which would mean they would reach the target but the pupil may miss out on taking English and Maths. The Executive Member for Children's Services emphasised that the new way of measuring was much better, because children who do not attain A-C in English and Maths were more likely to drop out of education at a later stage.

Decision:

To note the schools of concern.

CYP/OSG/10/12 Work Programme

The Subgroup discussed the work programme. Members discussed arranging the fact finding trips to two schools. The Head of Education Services suggested that visiting Newall Green High School would be useful it was implementing both a trust and a federation with local primary schools. The subgroup agreed to defer deciding which schools to visit until the next meeting, because considering the inspection reports would inform the decision.

Decision:

To decide which schools to visit in the December meeting of the Subgroup.