

Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2016

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair
Councillors Connolly, Cox and Reid
Ms Eve Holt, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative
Ms C Wibier, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative
Mrs B Kellner, Co-opted Member, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children’s Services

Apologies:

Councillor Midgley

YPC/OSG/16/01 Minutes

Decision

To agree the minutes of the Ofsted Subgroup meeting held on 10 November 2015 as a correct record.

YPC/OSG/16/02 Participation in Sport

The Chair informed members that this item had been deferred to a future meeting due to the report being late and because this meeting already had a busy agenda.

YPC/OSG/16/03 School Visits

The Chair reported that members of the Ofsted Subgroup had visited Ashbury Meadow Primary School and Green End Primary School. The Chair reported that he had attended the visit to Ashbury Meadow Primary School and had been very impressed with the school. Another member informed the Subgroup that she had attended the visit to Green End Primary School and that the school was outstanding in all areas. She praised the work of the Headteacher, who was also the Head of two other primary schools.

YPC/OSG/16/04 Ofsted Inspection into Help, Protection and Care of Children: Quality of Practice and Caseloads

The Committee received a report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children’s Services, the Strategic Lead for Early Help and Superintendent Sarah Jackson, Greater Manchester Police (GMP). The report was split into four parts. Part 1 of the report provided an update on Looked After Children (LAC), including fostering and adoption and missing from care. Part 2 of the report provided a progress update on Early Help. Part 3 of the report provided an update on the social care workforce outlining the numbers of new appointments and leavers. Part 4 of the report provided an overview of the announcement relating to changes for the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Notices.

The Strategic Lead – Children’s Social Care informed the Subgroup that one of the Council’s in-house children’s homes had now been rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted.

In response to a member’s question the Strategic Lead – Children’s Social Care reported that officers were working to reduce the number of changes of social worker for LAC and improve the retention of social workers. She also informed members that the Placement Sufficiency Strategy was being refreshed with the objectives of reducing use of external foster carers and reducing the number of LAC placed in children’s homes. The Executive Member for Children’s Services reported that the number of LAC had reduced, the number of in-house foster carers had increased and the time taken for children to be adopted had reduced.

The Subgroup discussed caseloads for social workers in Manchester. The Strategic Lead – Children’s Social Care acknowledged that caseloads in the north of the city were too high. She informed members that social work cases were being actively reviewed and that, once the Early Help Delivery Model becomes fully embedded into practice, need would be identified earlier and referrals reduced. The Executive Member for Children’s Services reported that caseloads had reduced overall but there were issues with higher caseloads in north Manchester and that she had agreed the recruitment of six social workers and a team manager for a temporary period to tackle this.

A member emphasised the need for more social workers and advised members that models such as Signs of Safety would only work if staff had the time to implement it effectively and did not have too high a caseload. She also asked for information on the costs associated with Signs of Safety. The Chair requested that further information on these costs be circulated to members of the Subgroup.

A member asked for further information on Signs of Safety. Another member asked how the asset-based approach, also known as ‘the Wigan Deal’ could help improve children’s social services.

The Executive Member for Children’s Services reported that Signs of Safety was a new approach which had well worked elsewhere, although it would take time to embed. She acknowledged that it wouldn’t be effective if caseloads were very high but also reported that it could help to reduce caseloads. She advised members that it fitted in with the asset-based approach as it involved the family in finding a solution to their problems and made parents and the community accountable. She informed the Subgroup that training on Signs of Safety could be arranged for all members.

The Interim Strategic Director of Children’s Services reported that the Signs of Safety approach was to empower children, families and communities to be self-sufficient, identify their problems and how to resolve them and to reduce dependency on statutory services. She reported that this fitted in with the asset-based approach which focused on creating self-sustaining communities. She advised that some families would still need specialist, targeted help but community assets could also be utilised. She advised members that the Council wanted to grow the capacity of local communities and the voluntary workforce and that ward councilors were key to this.

The Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that work was taking place to address a number of concerns for social workers, including caseloads, supervision, training and practical issues such as equipment. She advised members that social workers wanted a model for good social work practice, that the Signs of Safety model had been adopted by other local authorities which had improved their Ofsted rating from 'inadequate' to 'requires improvement' and 'good' and that this model fitted in with the Council's general strategic approach. The Strategic Lead – Children's Social Care reported that the Council had been advised that, to be rated as 'good', local authorities should have a model of practice in place.

The Project Manager - Children's Social Care Workforce reported that a recruitment campaign for social workers had been launched 12 months ago and that the Council had a reserve list of appointable candidates, who had already had pre-employment checks, to enable the Council to fill vacancies more quickly. She informed members that absence levels and caseloads were being monitored and agency social workers were brought in where necessary. She reported that there was a higher number of referrals in the north, along with retention issues and an increase in sickness levels, particularly short-term absence. She reported that absence was being managed through the attendance management policy. She advised members that caseload levels varied between social workers as new staff were given lower caseloads which were gradually increased over time. The Strategic Lead – Children's Social Care informed members that it was anticipated that some social workers would leave in June 2016, once they had received their retention payment, and, therefore, there would be a recruitment campaign aimed at experienced social workers.

A member asked for further information on the role of children's homes in the future and whether they would have a specialist focus. The Strategic Lead – Children's Social Care informed the Subgroup that a review was being carried out and an options paper would be produced which members could comment on.

In response to a member's questions, the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services informed members that she was awaiting written feedback from the Ofsted Front Door non-reportable inspection. She advised members that Ofsted had informed her that there was significant improvement in this area. She reported that they had commented positively on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and strong partnership working and that no cases had been identified which weren't safe. The Executive Member for Children's Services advised members that more work was required but that, overall, there was more positive feedback than negative. She reported that issues raised included police dominance in multi-agency meetings, duplication of the assessment process when cases were passed from MASH to Early Help and over-cautiousness about confidentiality.

The Subgroup discussed the Early Help Strategy and the need to increase the number of Early Help Assessments (EHAs) registered with the Council. The Strategic Lead for Early Help advised members that work was taking place to support partners and put in place a simplified system which avoided duplication. She reported that schools were working with each other and with the Council to deliver the Early Help strategy and that approximately 12 schools were working with around 100 families. In response to a member's questions, she reported that the

government had committed to the Troubled Families programme until 2020 and there was no indication that the funding was being withdrawn.

Decisions

1. To note the report.
2. To request that information on the costs of Signs of Safety be circulated to members.

YPC/OSG/16/05 Ofsted Reports for Schools, Children's Centres and Daycare Providers

The Ofsted Subgroup considered a selection of Ofsted Inspection Reports that had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years informed members that Ofsted had carried out very few inspections since September 2015. She reported that St Francis RC Primary School had previously been judged to be 'outstanding' but that a decline in outcomes at Key Stage 1 (KS1) had triggered an inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. She advised that this was a 1-day inspection, with the option to extend to a 2-day inspection. However, she reported that, after the first day, Ofsted were satisfied with their findings and judged that there was no change in the school's rating.

In response to a member's question, the Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years confirmed that inspections could be triggered by a complaint. However, she reported that in this case, no formal complaint had been made against the school and the performance data had triggered the inspection.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years reported that St Francis' KS1 performance was on course to increase to its previous levels. In response to a member's question, she reported that a number of schools which had been judged 'outstanding' under a previous Ofsted Framework had not been re-inspected under the current framework.

A member expressed concern that schools inspected as 'outstanding' under a previous framework were not being routinely re-inspected and that Ofsted inspections might not have picked up underlying areas of concern with a school.

The Chair recommended that the Subgroup write to St Francis RC Primary School, following their recent inspection.

The Subgroup considered the report of Abraham Moss School which had previously been assessed as 'requires improvement' under the old framework and had received the same rating under the new framework. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years advised members that the school now had more areas of strength and that its primary provision was now 'good'. She drew members' attention to the comment in the report that a minority of staff were not supportive of the speed of

change within the school and advised members that the report would give the Head the backing to challenge this.

A member expressed concern at the underachievement of boys. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years reported that the school was reviewing its curriculum and topics to make them more accessible to boys and was tracking the progress of different groups of pupils.

Members welcomed the strengthened role of the governing body. They discussed the importance of an effective governing body and how this could be supported and strengthened. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years informed members that the Council was working through the Manchester Governors Association and the Manchester Schools Alliance to strengthen governing bodies. She reported that training was being provided to Chairs to improve their skills and that the Council also provided briefings to Chairs. The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that some governing bodies struggled to recruit to the Chair's position, as it was a big commitment.

The Subgroup considered the report for St Matthew's RC High School, which had previously been judged as 'good'. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years advised members that Ofsted had conducted a 1-day inspection which had been extended to 2 days, as there had not been sufficient evidence to show that the school was still 'good'. She reported that, following the 2-day inspection, the school had been assessed as 'requires improvement'. She informed members that the school would receive monitoring visits and would be re-inspected within approximately 30 months.

Members commented on the key issues of attendance, behaviour and mathematics, which had resulted in the 'requires improvement' judgement. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years advised members that the definition of persistence absence had been changed from 20% absence to 15% and more recently to 10% so the numbers of persistent absentees was expected to rise. However, she reported that St Matthew's RC High School absence levels were not in line with the average for other schools.

The Subgroup considered the report for Big Life Families – Rusholme Nursery, a private daycare provider based in the Council's premises, which had been assessed as 'requires improvement'. A member expressed concern that the provider had failed to notify Ofsted of the appointment of a new manager. A member reported that Big Life managed a number of nurseries and a school within Manchester and had a good reputation but that it was important not to make assumptions about the quality of a provider based on their reputation. In response to a member's question, the Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years assured members that the Council was working closely with Big Life and that the organisation was taking appropriate steps to improve.

The Subgroup considered the report for Kiddiwinks Day Nursery which had received an 'inadequate' rating. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years advised members that this was another provider which had failed to notify Ofsted of

the appointment of a new manager. However, she reported that the new manager was keen to make improvements and had already started making changes.

In response to a member's question, the Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years informed the Subgroup that providers who had received an 'inadequate' rating were required to work closely with the Council's Early Years Quality Assurance Team and that improvement was expected within 3 months. She advised that, if sufficient improvements were not made within this time, funding would be cut.

Members considered the report for Sale Road Nursery which had received a 'good' rating. Members were pleased to note that the nursery had improved from 'inadequate' to 'good' within a few months.

The Subgroup discussed the importance of the language used by childcare workers in developing children's speech. A member expressed concern that staff in some private nurseries did not have an underpinning knowledge of child development. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years reported that training on Communication and Language Friendly Environments was available for day care providers. She reported that staff turnover was an issue within the private nursery sector but that it was hoped the introduction of the national living wage could help improve staff retention. Members who had visited Ashbury Meadow Primary School reported that the school had very impressive early years provision and that the Head did not oversimplify her language when talking to the children.

Members discussed the sustainability of private day care provision in the city and expressed concern about the impact on the sector of schools accepting children from the age of 3. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years acknowledged that this was an issue. However, she reported that the quality of nursery and childminder provision in the city was improving.

Decisions

1. To write to St Francis RC Primary School, following their recent inspection.
2. To note the report of Abraham Moss School which received a 'requires improvement' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.
3. To note the report of St Matthew's RC High School which received a 'requires improvement' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.
4. To note the report of Big Life Families – Rusholme Nursery which received a 'requires improvement' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.
5. To note the report of Kiddiwinks Day Nursery which received an 'inadequate' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.
6. To write to Sale Road Nursery congratulating them on their recent 'good' inspection result.

YPC/OSG/16/06 Terms of Reference and work programme

Decision

To hold an additional meeting on 8 March, including consideration of the deferred Participation in Sport report and a selection of Ofsted Inspection Reports including Cedar Mount Academy.