

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors N Ali, Alijah, Amin, Bano, Bell, Fletcher, Gartside, Lovecy, Marsh, Muse, Nunney, Sadler and Sharif Mahamed

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative

Mr Y Yonis, Parent Governor Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People

Councillor Hacking, Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure

John Rowlands, Executive Principal and CEO, Greater Manchester Academy Trust (GMAT)

Apologies:

Councillors Hewitson, Judge, Ludford and McHale

Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/23/54 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023.

CYP/23/55 Attainment Headline outcomes 2023 (provisional)

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Education which provided a summary of the 2023 provisional outcomes of statutory assessment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. It also provided a list of actions which were being progressed to address some of the gaps in learning.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) outcomes;
- Year 1 Phonic Test outcomes;
- Key Stage 1 outcomes;
- Key Stage 2 provisional results;
- Key Stage 4 GCSE provisional headline results;
- Stage 5 A Level provisional headline results; and
- Next steps.

The Committee heard from John Rowlands, Executive Principal and CEO, Greater Manchester Academy Trust (GMAT), which was a small multi-academy trust which provided nursery, primary and secondary education in north Manchester, as well as associate leadership and management support to a local authority-maintained nursery and Children's Centres. He outlined how the Trust provided a cradle to career approach within the area, supporting children, families and communities. He reported that the area served had high levels of deprivation and that the Trust worked to understand the lived experience of the children and focused on both quality of teaching and mitigating the impact of social disadvantage, working with the Council and other partners. He highlighted the importance of young people having not only good results but also developing the right character and a positive perception of their area. He informed the Committee about the role of the Trust's Manchester Communication Research School, whose role was to impart evidence-informed practice across the region and beyond. He highlighted some of the work the Trust had been doing to secure improvements, including a focus on early years and on mental health, both in school and within families, supporting community cohesion and working with partners on issues such as housing. He provided an overview of the current position, including the impact of the pandemic, particularly on younger children, which schools were working to address, and positive results at GCSE, highlighting the progress made by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. He finished by emphasising the importance of investing in early years now in order to secure positive future outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- To welcome the approach taken by GMAT, including work with the local community;
- Competing pressures on headteachers and senior leadership teams;
- School workforce;
- International New Arrivals;
- Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), including how children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and other additional needs were being accommodated, including in relation to Behaviour Policies; and
- The impact of the pandemic and lessons learnt.

John Rowlands outlined how his Trust recruited teachers, based not only on teaching ability but also on their alignment to the Trust's values and highlighted the excellent teacher training centres in the region. In response to a question on Continuing Professional Development (CPD), he reported that the Trust used a long-term model based on evidence-informed practice to address needs and gaps in the school workforce. He informed Members how the Trust had responded to the arrival of 26 pupils evacuated from Afghanistan, supporting them and their families. He advised that there was a recruitment and retention challenge in schools in relation to both teachers and the wider school workforce and highlighted the Trust's retention policy. In response to a question on advice for secondary headteachers in relation to supporting the transition of pupils into Year 7 where they had not come from a

primary school within the same Trust, he reported that it was important to work with the Council on excellence in transition and to understand the context and lived experience of those children entering the school. He reported that his Trust had put in place a pastoral tracker across 17 schools in north Manchester which helped with obtaining a full picture of a child and family's circumstances and he advised that parents were key partners who were experts on their circumstances and it was important to work effectively with both the family and professional partners.

The Assistant Director of Education reported that all schools were expected to make reasonable adjustments for children with SEND, including in relation to the application of behaviour policies, and she highlighted some of the support available to schools, including the Inclusion Toolkit, outreach support from special schools and the Autism in Schools Project. In response to a Member's question about children who had not yet received a diagnosis, she advised that the approach taken was to meet the presenting needs, rather than waiting for a diagnosis.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People highlighted the positive impact of Manchester schools on the city's children and the impact that not being in school or early years settings during the pandemic had had, stating that more time should be spent as a country considering the impact of this and the mitigation needed to address it. In response to a question about increasing numbers of children with SEND, he advised that there was a challenge in identifying whether some children had missed developmental milestones because of the pandemic or had longer-term additional needs. He advised that further information on the work the Council was doing could be included in a future report on SEND.

The Assistant Director of Education outlined some of the learning from the pandemic, including the importance of a holistic approach from schools, continuing education as much as possible while children were not in school, particularly in relation to literacy, and the disproportionate impact on young children from missing out on early socialisation and the importance of taking steps to address that quickly after that period.

In response to a question about teaching children who had English as an Additional Language (EAL), the Director of Education reported that this was part of the routine work of some Manchester schools who had become experts in this but that in cases where children from, for example, Afghanistan, were placed in schools which did not have that experience, the schools were being paired up with more experienced schools which could share their expertise. In response to a further question about EAL, John Rowlands reported that his Trust had five tiers to reflect the different levels of English that pupil might have with a separate approach for each tier, which could include enabling them to study their heritage language.

The Chair advised that the Committee would receive a further report at a later date with a breakdown of the results including by gender and ethnicity and would then be able to look into these factors in more detail. She highlighted the experience of white disadvantaged boys and the importance of parental support and expectations. She welcomed the work that GMAT was doing, including working with children from their early years throughout their education as well as working with the community, and asked what more support the Council and Councillors could provide, for example, in

relation to housing. She highlighted the challenges families were experiencing in relation to housing and how the Council was working to address this. She also asked how budget constraints impacted on the Trust's ability to do this work.

John Rowlands reported that GMAT had an effective partnership relationship with the Council and other organisations such as Shelter to address housing issues. He acknowledged the Chair's point about constraints on school budgets and advised that efficiencies could be achieved as part of a multi-academy trust as well as by sharing resources across the wider group of schools which were part of the Family Zone.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/23/56 A progress update on Childcare Sufficiency 2023 and the Early Years Capital Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an overview of the Manchester's Childcare Sufficiency Report 2023 and a summary of progress to date on the capital investment made in the Council's Early Years estate.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- The Early Years National Context;
- Sufficiency of childcare and early learning opportunities in Manchester;
- New childcare entitlements from April 2024;
- Provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- Capital improvements to the Early Years estate;
- Phase 2 update;
- Additional developments to the Early Years estate; and
- Lease reviews.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- To welcome the focus on training the workforce;
- The decarbonisation bids for six Early Years buildings;
- Concern that the funding to develop and expand wraparound childcare in Manchester for primary school aged children from working households only related to term-time; and
- That some of the areas with insufficient 2-year-old places to meet potential demand were very close together (for example, Old Moat, Withington and Fallowfield) and what was being done to address this.

The Lead for Statutory Area Early Year Access and Sufficiency reported that she would speak to officers in Capital Programmes to get an update on the decarbonisation bids. In response to a Member's question, she provided an overview of the Dingley's Promise Inclusive Practice Training and stated that she

would check how FASD was covered in the training and respond to the Member. She acknowledged the Member's point about working parents needing wraparound childcare during school holidays and stated that it was hoped that developing sustainable wraparound provision during term-time, which included supporting families to claim all their entitlements, would help providers to extend the offer further.

The Director of Education highlighted the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) scheme which ran during the school holidays for children who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People reported that a lot of work was taking place on Early Years buildings which would have a demonstrable impact on the buildings' carbon footprint, whether or not the bids referred to in the report were successful.

The Chair expressed concern about changes in immigration rules, levels of pay and qualification requirements in the Early Years sector affecting recruitment and retention. She highlighted that the new funding for wraparound care was for the set-up costs and that parents would still have to pay for their children to attend breakfast clubs and after-school clubs under the current Government. She informed Members about the difficulties some parents in her ward were experiencing in finding childcare places. She asked what was being done to increase capacity in the Early Years sector as the free offer expanded, including the recruitment of additional childminders, advising that billboards could be used, as well as reaching out to black and ethnic minority communities. She expressed concern that asbestos removal work to the Early Years estate in her area had been carried out during the day and advised that it should be carried out on evenings and weekends.

The Lead for Statutory Area Early Year Access and Sufficiency confirmed that recruitment and retention of staff was the main issue affecting the sustainability of the Early Years sector. She reported that the Council was working with Greater Manchester colleagues on strategies to address this, including training opportunities, as well as raising this issue through consultations. She stated that this had included sending representation on the challenges being faced to the Education Select Committee, including highlighting that pay rates were low. She acknowledged Members' concerns about neighbouring wards which had sufficiency issues, advising that her team looked at this wider picture, and she provided an update on the areas Members had raised and work to improve sufficiency, including exploring options for existing providers to expand their provision and supporting providers with the recruitment and retention of staff. In response to comments from the Chair about encouraging schools to increase their Early Years capacity, including taking children from the age of two, she confirmed that this was something which could be explored further in areas where more places were needed. She informed Members about a consultation that the Council was currently undertaking with childminders in the city, including making them aware of the new funding streams. She reported that due diligence was being carried out in relation to all asbestos removal work.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People expressed concern that the Government was expanding entitlement to free childcare without funding the sector properly. He informed Members about plans to better recognise

and reward the work of childcare providers, including an event at Gorton Monastery in February 2024.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/23/57 Post-16 Education Employment Training Strategic Plan 2022- 25 - Progress Update

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an update on work done by the Council which had had a positive impact on increasing the number of young people accessing Education Employment Training (EET) opportunities in the city over the last 2 years. It also outlined the plans for this work moving forward which aligned with the Our Manchester Forward to 2025 Strategy and Manchester Inclusion Strategy 2022-25. The report outlined how the cohort of young people post 16 was set to increase year on year which was causing significant pressure on places across the post 16 sector. It stated that plans were in place to expand existing provision and to open new provisions but there was no planned growth of places for technical courses. It also stated that projected continued growth of the post 16 cohort in the next few years as well as the planned reform of Level 2 technical education might adversely impact on the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training going forward.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Background/context;
- Progress to date in relation to;
 - Young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET);
 - Post-16 provision;
 - The Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI); and
 - Qualification reform; and
- Business engagement and Skills for Life.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- Tracking young people who had been identified through the RONI after they had entered college and supporting them beyond the first term;
- That NEET prevention work needed to be FASD-, neurobehaviourally- and trauma-informed;
- To request that a representative of Career Connect be invited when this item was considered again;
- The approach to supporting young people with SEND who were at risk of becoming NEET;
- The lack of clarity on post-16 technical pathways, which was making it difficult for schools and students to prepare;
- Mentoring opportunities;
- The need for additional sixth form provision in north Manchester; and
- Challenges in finding work experience placements.

The Executive Member for Skills, Employment and Leisure emphasised the importance of urgently addressing the pressure on post-16 technical and vocational places, highlighting the impact on the quality of the post-16 offer and on the number of young people who were NEET and he reported that the Council was working closely with partners on this.

The Post-16 Lead outlined how young people who had been identified in Year 11 as at risk of becoming NEET were supported, stating that this continued over the summer period. He reported that checks were then carried out early in the new academic year on whether they had started at their planned destination and, if not, further support was quickly put into place. He informed Members that in the last academic year, schools had been encouraged to identify young people earlier, in Year 10. He informed Members that work took place with partners to provide appropriate support for young people with SEND who were at risk of becoming NEET. He also informed Members about work to provide a range of opportunities for young people, beyond traditional college places, including providers who could provide appropriate opportunities for targeted groups of young people.

The Director of Education informed Members that a member of staff from Career Connect was co-located in special schools for children with social, emotional and mental health needs and the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) so they would have a good understanding of and relationship with the young people they were supporting. She reported that a lot of other special schools had sixth forms so would continue to work with and support their young people. She advised that, for young people with SEND in mainstream schools, the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) in the school would work with the SENCO in the college on their transition. She informed Members that all secondary schools had access to a mentoring programme. She acknowledged the Member's point about the need for more sixth form provision in north Manchester, advising that the Council was working hard in exploring options to address this gap.

In response to a Member's comments about supporting young people who had been identified through RONI beyond their first term at college, the Director of Education reported that post-16 settings had pastoral departments to support students. The Post-16 Lead reported that there was also a transition period and that, if a young person left their course or training provision, they could receive support from Career Connect.

The Director of Education reported that the specification for the technical pathway was still unclear. She reported that the T-Level was an equivalent level to A-Levels and a pathway to university but could be too difficult for some 16-year-olds wanting to take a technical route, who needed another qualification as a stepping stone, such as a BTEC qualification; however, she advised, that the Government planned to abolish BTEC qualifications for subjects which had a T-Level.

The Chair reported that some schools wanted to provide a sixth form but were unable to obtain the funding for this. She asked about student places at Manchester College, following the closure of some of its sites. She commented on the changes in the approach to supporting young people with learning disabilities, enabling

greater independence. She reported that, following the abolition of Connexions and Aim Higher, a lot of support for students was now provided by colleges themselves but that this impacted on their budgets. She expressed concern at the gap between Level 2 qualifications and Level 3 T-Levels. She highlighted the role Social Value could play in providing apprenticeships and supporting young people.

In response to comments from Members about funding to expand post-16 places, the Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People advised that the Council had duties for sufficiency at post-16 without having the funding but had been working creatively to try to address sufficiency issues as well as lobbying the Government. He acknowledged the importance of work experience placements, advising that this had been raised through the Our Year engagement and that addressing this would be a priority within the work to become a UNICEF Child-Friendly City.

The Director of Education reported that Manchester College had rationalised its estate, closing some of its sites while installing state-of-the-art facilities at the city centre and Openshaw campuses, in order to deliver technical qualifications, and that this had not been a reduction in student places.

Decision

To request that a representative of Career Connect be invited when this item is considered again.

[Councillor Bridges declared a personal interest as a Board Member of the Manchester College and Governor of the LTE Group.]

CYP/23/58 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.