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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 10 FEBRUARY 2016

(7.15 pm - 10.05 pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Councillor Katy Neep (in the Chair),  
Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico,  
Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry,  
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Sally Kenny,  
Councillor Dennis Pearce, Denis Popovs and  
Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Education), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Head of School Improvement) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Maxi Martin, Jeff Hanna and Marsie Skeet and co-opted member Colin Powell.

The resignation of co-opted member Simon Bennett was noted.

The Chair also informed the panel of the death of co-opted member Peter Connellan. Thanks were giving for Mr Connellan's contribution and it was noted condolences have been sent to his family.

Requests have already been made to the appropriate organisations to seek replacements to fill both vacant co-opted member posts.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

None.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Panel members sought to clarify why comments are not attributed to named panel members in the minutes.

**RESOLVED:** To seek legal advice from Paul Evans, Assistant Director, Corporate Governance on writing minutes of scrutiny panel meetings.

### 4 UPDATE FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN WHELTON, CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION (Agenda Item 4)

Martin Whelton provided an opening narrative; there has been an improvement across all indicators in the last three years although some slight drops in the last year. Merton had the fastest improving GCSE results in London in 2014. As Cabinet Member for Education, his role is to monitor and challenge including examining the data of individual schools, monitoring if schools are achieving expected progress and questioning officers based on this knowledge. It is important to understand if fluctuations in performance are cohort related or are the result of other trends. With resources stretched, capacity of officers to intervene with schools needs to be carefully targeted.

In response to member questions, Yvette Stanley clarified;

- Schools are monitored in an ongoing fashion, and proportionate to their level of need to ensure they are on track. This goes beyond examination of data and includes softer measures such as a senior staff leaving a school and any increase in safeguarding reports;
- Schools in the *Requires Improvement* Ofsted category are given additional support and challenge;
- The Department's relationship with schools in the *Good* Ofsted category is required to be light touch and very light touch for those that are *Outstanding* making it more difficult to identify schools that aren't on track in these categories. This is being exacerbated by the diversification and fragmentation of the schools system and the reduction of the middle tier (the role of the council); and
- Exam data for all schools is available in the summer with benchmark data available from September. All schools receive feedback from the Department and, where needed, are called in for meetings to discuss how to address any deterioration in pupil progress and outcomes. Any school subject to an Ofsted inspection in the autumn term would therefore have little opportunity to address any identified issue(s) in pupil outcomes.

## 5 SCHOOL STANDARDS: ANNUAL REPORT ON ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS OF PUPILS IN MERTON SCHOOLS (Agenda Item 5)

### **Executive Summary**

Jane McSherry noted there has been a rapid improvement in Ofsted outcomes and that there is good picture in terms of year-on-year and trend comparisons with national data. The change in the Key Stage 4 performance measure in 2014 was highlighted meaning that comparison with previous data is not possible. It was explained that the Department's target is to do the same or better than statistical and Outer London neighbours on all measures.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- Attendance is improving whilst rates of persistence absence are failing (these are both positive trends);
- Support and training for Early Years assessments is on-going as there is a continual need to ensure this is strengthened and being done correctly, particularly by teachers new to the workforce; and

- Inclusion and safeguarding are supported through safeguarding leads meeting termly or more often to share best practice, advice, policies and research on inclusion and how to support families. This is an essential part of the school improvement process.

Keith Shipman noted consideration of wellbeing is reflected in broader achievement.

## Context

Clarification was provided in response to panel member questions:

- (Jane McSherry) Benchmarking external to the borough happens not only via national datasets but also through membership of the *South West London Schools Partnership* and the *London Assistant Directors Group*;
- (Elizabeth Fitzpatrick) The increasing responsibility on governing bodies to scrutinise schools has resulted in a change to the required skill set of governors. Merton has been evaluating the governing bodies in all schools with mixed outcomes. Work is happening to develop governing bodies further; and
- (Jane McSherry) Every school in the borough has a *Merton Education Partner* who is responsible for challenging and supporting the head and school leadership team to achieve school improvement. Schools judged to be less than good, either through their most recent inspection, or as a result of concerns being raised between inspections, receive additional challenge through half termly ‘Support and Challenge’ meetings with detailed scrutiny of all data.

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted the increase in pupils achieving the ‘Good Level of Development’ and the *Average Point Score*. Last year’s target to narrow the attainment gap for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium in this phase of education focused on schools with the biggest gap, and where fewer pupils achieved the ‘Good Level of Development’. Schools involved with the project made better than average improvements. The new baseline assessment that takes place as children join the school in Early Years has been piloted in 2015/2016 and will be implemented in the next academic year.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- A full breakdown of the progress for all ethnic groups is available on page 83 of the agenda pack; and
- The progress and achievement of those identified as on *SEN support* remains a priority with more being done to identify these pupils earlier and give them access to support.

Yvette Stanley highlighted the demographic time bomb that is affecting the whole capital with many heads hitting retirement age, and the knock on requirement to recruit strong and successful heads in their place. The strengths of retiring headteachers are being drawn on in many ways: for example, supporting the Council’s School Improvement team.

## Primary phase

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted the 9% increase in children reaching the expected standard in phonics decoding over the past two years and the narrowing of the achievement gap achieved in this phase for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. Whilst improvements at Key Stage 1 might be seen to have plateaued, it should be noted that with regard to progress across Key Stage 2, Merton is ranked 8th in the country for reading and 4th for writing. It was highlighted that the nationally expected level to be achieved by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 will rise to the equivalent of a level 2b and level 4b respectively from summer 2016.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- The less strong improvements in the maths results is linked to big changes in the primary maths curriculum; for example aspects of what used to be expected in Year 6 now have to be secured in Year 4;
- All schools are being encouraged to provide support for parents whilst changes to assessment come into effect;
- Both the Singapore and Shanghai models for teaching maths are being used in schools in the borough, with approaches from both being incorporated in the new National Curriculum. Judgements about the effectiveness of schools' approaches to teaching maths are made on whether maths teaching is having an impact and is well led in the school; and
- Prior underachievement in Key Stage 1 is being robustly tackled. Cohorts are now in Year 3 and above with the progress of each year group being carefully monitored.

## **Secondary phase**

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted that whilst the headline GSCE figure is down, if the performance of Academies is removed, the authority has maintained its high performance from 2014. At Key Stage 5, whilst performance in all indicators has improved, the *Average Point Score* per student has not risen as much as nationally. This is being discussed with schools.

In response to panel member questions, Yvette Stanley clarified:

- Changes to grade boundaries have had an impact on achievement at Key Stage 4 making this a less reliable measure. Pupils' progress is a better measure;
- Schools are paying to support individuals to have GCSEs remarked because access to A Level programmes depends on GCSE grades. The desire for stability in grade boundaries was highlighted; and
- The implementation of the English Baccalaureate is putting pressure on the recruitment and retention of maths, science and modern foreign language teachers. The need to expand provision because of population growth means that there is also pressure on head recruitment and retention. This is being discussed with the Department for Education.

## **Inclusion**

Keith Shipman highlighted there has been a significant reduction in the number for which destinations are "not known". This means that there is a corresponding increase in the number of NEETs, but this figure remains lower overall than the national and London averages. The overall picture for young people that are NEET and not known is a good one. The large number of NEETs with special educational

needs is being examined in depth (an increase of 27%). Merton is part of a group of London boroughs bidding for ESF funds to support NEET provision.

Fixed term exclusions have significantly reduced. The increase in permanent secondary exclusions is linked to persistent disruptive behaviour. The Department is working with a small group of Headteachers to identify reasons for this increase.

In response to panel member questions, Keith Shipman clarified:

- Use by Merton schools of *London Ambitions* will be explored;
- The number of young mothers in the NEET cohort has gone up despite teenage pregnancies decreasing. This is because young mothers are coming into the borough from other areas to access housing. These young mothers come under the remit of the *MyFuture* initiative with provision for their children through the Early Years Service
- The number of those with SEN within the NEET cohort emphasises the need for better vocational provision and routes into employment;
- In-depth research has found that parental illness is a key cause of persistent absence, but where schools offer support it is possible to make a difference, enabling children to achieve the 90% attendance target. However, it is important to explain to parents that 90% attendance is the minimum required;
- There are some inherent difficulties in successfully addressing the behaviour of children from out of the borough; it is harder to access a range of support services out of borough.

Yvette Stanley agreed that there is a need to continue to work on the inclusion of black Caribbean children including home-school relationships.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

## 6 BRIEFING: SCHOOL STANDARDS COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)

Jane McSherry provided a verbal update on the School Standards Committee. This has met four times since April 2015. The committee consists of a chair, councillors and one co-opted member. Its work comprises:

1. Consideration of overarching issues: looking at thematic issues affecting school improvement generically in the borough; and
2. In-depth scrutiny of individual school performance: schools that have recently had an Ofsted inspection are chosen for scrutiny. This covers a range of Ofsted outcomes from outstanding to requiring improvement. The preparation for this scrutiny includes a school visit, a detailed consideration of all the school's data and academic achievement/progress, the input of the school's education partner and an examination of the most recent Ofsted report. Gorringe, Lonesome, St Mark's and Poplar Primary Schools are those that have most recently attended the committee. The SMART Centre and Raynes Park High School will participate next. Schools that go through this process were noted to find it beneficial.

**RESOLVED:** to thank officers for the new approach of the School Standards Committee through which the council is leading on school improvement.

## 7 PROGRESS UPDATE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

**Recommendation 1:** in response to a panel member question, Jane McSherry clarified that the council does not have a written policy on school leadership succession. It is planned to develop this as part of the revision of the school improvement strategy.

**RESOLVED:** for the council to have a written policy on school leadership succession.

8 UPDATE REPORT: CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS (Agenda Item 8)

**Bomb alert hoax warnings:** Yvette Stanley clarified that whilst Merton had been one of the worst affected areas, police have advised that these are not terrorism related incidents but a form of IT crime; they are being caused by those who want to cause disruption. All warnings are subject to a police risk assessment which means it is unlikely that they will be in attendance. The Department has met with all secondary heads, is talking to all primary heads and continues to issue guidance which forms part of on-going safeguarding practice. The panel was reminded that children are safest when in school.

**Troubled families:** in response to a panel member question, Yvette Stanley confirmed the council will still be in receipt of funding for troubled families (about half of the funding previously received). This will be targeted at those with the most complex needs.

**School admission arrangements:** a panel member expressed concern regarding the rental of flats in the Wimbledon Chase area to secure a school place. Paul Ballatt confirmed that the consultation on school admission arrangements remains open and that similar points were being made in the responses received.

**RESOLVED:** for the panel to review the findings of the consultation on school admission arrangements when these are available.

**School places:** in response to a panel member question, Keith Shipman clarified every case of a child seeking to return to a school after an extended period of time (ie: a year), is individually examined. It would need to be understood if the child had remained on or had been removed from the school roll. If removed, they would need to reapply for entry to the school and a place would only be given if available. Yvette Stanley emphasised that it is policy not to prevent access to education for any child.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

9 PERFORMANCE REPORT: CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (Agenda Item 9)

In response to a panel member question, Yvette Stanley explained the increase in items designated with a red status on the Children, Schools and Families Department Performance plan, has resulted from various factors, including:

- An end of year accumulation;

- Ambitious targets; and
- Working with challenging cohorts, (for example, teenagers not turning up for review meetings).

Yvette Stanley also confirmed that performance indicators will be reviewed and adjusted in line with services plans, to make them more challenging based on what has now been achieved.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

10 WORK PROGRAMME: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (Agenda Item 10)

The Chair highlighted the plans for the next panel meeting (22 March 2016) which will focus on *Looked-After Children* and feature an expert witness and a workshop approach.

**RESOLVED:** to agree the work programme as set out in the agenda.