
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 9 May 2019

Present:

County Councillors:

M Maddocks (Chairman)
J Baker (Vice Chairman)
J Chandler (Vice Chairman)
M Durham
C Guglielmi (substitute)
J Henry
P May
R Pratt
P Reid
C Souter

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, was also present throughout.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Egan (for whom Councillor Guglielmi substituted), Lumley, and Richard Carson, Educational Co-optee. No declarations of interest were made.

2 Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no questions from the public

4. Educational Attainment in Essex

The Committee considered report PAF/12/19 detailing educational outcomes for children and young people in Essex primary, secondary and special schools for the academic year ending Summer 2018, covering Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1, 2, 4 and 5. The report also included an update on absence levels and those young people Not in education, Employment and Training (NEETs), as well as an overview of specific cohorts of pupils.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the issues and respond to questions:

Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member – Education and Skills;
Clare Kershaw, Director – Education
Mark Gant – Education Performance Manager

During discussion the following was highlighted, acknowledged and/or noted:

- (i) 88% of Essex schools were judged as Good or Outstanding (Special Schools 85%). However it was highlighted that some OFSTED judgements were dated and many schools with poor ratings had since converted to academies;
- (ii) One of the main challenges was to move 'Good' rated schools to 'Outstanding'.
- (iii) Early Years Foundation: 74% of pupils achieved a good level of development – with 57% of Essex pupils in the top quartile.
- (iv) Harlow and Tendring were the weakest districts in terms of educational attainment and more focus was being put on those areas.
- (v) There were some major performance challenges in KS4 which were partly due to changes in the assessment process; for example, previously one of the qualifications assessed was the European Computing Driving Licence which was not now included in assessments and not featuring in the data. However, it was highlighted that none of the changes were different to elsewhere in the country so perhaps there needed to be more challenge about building pupil resilience to change.
- (vi) Outcomes for disadvantaged children remained a challenge locally and nationally.
- (vii) There had been some improvement in OFSTED ratings for schools in the Tendring area – the County Council was working with pockets of schools in that area including having an extensive reading programme in ten primary schools which it was hoped would start to impact on outcomes. It was highlighted that there did seem to be a particularly more mobile school population in the Tendring area with significant migration.
- (viii) The County Council had a school improvement service which worked with schools to drive improvement. Whilst the County Council could have discussions with academies, it did not have the same level of influence over them as with maintained schools

and often depended on the relationships developed with individual academies over time.

- (ix) The Timpson Review on School Exclusions had just been published and had made recommendations to the DoE. One proposal was for schools to still be held to account for those they exclude. Schools were being asked to sign-up to the Essex Exclusion Statement and to be as inclusive as far as possible.
- (x) Increasingly children are presenting with more challenging behaviour. It was acknowledged that perhaps there had been too much focus in the past on assessment programmes rather than attainment outcomes.
- (xi) There was a Pilot to make school workforces more informed on trauma and encourage teachers to not solely react to behaviours in the classroom but also whether there is a trauma incident behind it outside of the class room which may be causing bad behaviour.
- (xii) One of the biggest concerns was monitoring and tracking the cohort of NEETs, particularly those that go missing who could become vulnerable to exploitation by gangs.
- (xiii) The County Council now had a bespoke team to look at off-rolling which had resulted in an increase in the number of investigations of missing children. A major challenge remained that this team was dependent on being notified of off-rolling by schools.
- (xiv) The Cabinet Member was setting up a cross party group to look at the increasing numbers of children and young people being educated at home. It was thought that there could be schools encouraging 'off-rolling' and educating at home rather than pursuing exclusion of pupils. There was also a growing cohort of parents with children with additional educational needs who did not feel that they were being adequately met in maintained schools. The County Council's powers to intervene in home education was extremely limited (usually only if safeguarding concerns are raised) and the Cabinet member suggested that further national legislation was needed in this area. The County Council encouraged registration but it was only voluntary at the moment.
- (xv) A cohort of pupils that was causing concern was those who could not be educated due to medical reasons, such as anxiety, mental health etc and the County Council was running some workshops with schools to look at this to see if more bespoke emotional wellbeing support can be provided to assist getting them back into formal education.

- (xvi) There was extensive ongoing capital investment into SEN/Pupil Referral Unit estate and four bespoke schools were being built to meet specific special needs (e.g. autism) to reduce demand for out of county provision. However, there would always be need for some out of county provision for very bespoke services such as for sensory or multi-sensory needs.
- (xvii) Teacher recruitment was both challenging in some geographical areas of the county (e.g. for primary school teachers in the south of the county and North East Essex) and also for certain specialist subjects such as sciences. Probably one of the more successful recruitment initiatives was 'growing your own' by promoting teaching as a career through local schools and colleges. The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of providing local affordable housing to assist recruitment. It was acknowledged that academy trusts sometimes had an advantage in recruiting as they were sometimes able to offer better career progression within the trust.
- (xviii) Teaching Assistants were an important supplement to teachers although it was the latter actually delivering the formal learning content. There was some research indicating that SEN pupils could become too dependent on their teaching assistant and not fully develop the learning relationship with their teacher.
- (xix) Primary Schools should be establishing relationships with nurseries etc. to assist transitions from pre-school to primary school.

Conclusion

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for preparing the detailed report and providing the update. As indicated in the meeting, the Committee intended to have a further discussion about whether they wanted to change any aspects of the update and the process for future years and would advise on that in due course.

Thereafter the Cabinet member and supporting officers left the meeting.

5. Work Programme

The committee considered report PAF/13/19.

It was agreed to note the report

6. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Committee activity day was scheduled for Thursday 13 June 2019 which may be held in public, be a private session, briefing or site visit – to be confirmed nearer the time. [Clerks note: the date of the next meeting was subsequently changed from 13th June to the 27th June 2019]

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.10pm.

Chairman