

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 30 November 2023 from 10.32 am - 12.31 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Samuel Gardiner
Councillor Michael Savage
Councillor Adele Williams

Absent

Councillor Naim Salim
Councillor Fozia Mubashar
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Ethan Radford
Councillor Maria Watson

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Liz Anderson	- Independent Consultant
Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder Children, Young People and Education
Sally Gladwin	- Department of Education
Jennifer Hardy	- Project Manager - NCC
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services - NCC
Kate Morris	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer – NCC
Carl Pattison	- Flying High Multi Academy Trust
Helen Pledger	- Department of Education
Samina Ring	- Raleigh Learning Trust
Damon Stanton	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer – NCC

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Fozia Mubashar	- Personal
Councillor Georgia Power	- Personal
Councillor Ethan Radford	- Other Council Business
Councillor Naim Salim	- Unwell

19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

20 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair of this meeting.

21 PRIORITY EDUCATION INVESTMENT AREA (PEIA) UPDATE

Nick Lees, Director of Education introduced the report detailing the work of the Priority Education Investment Area. Attending alongside him was Sally Gladwin, Department for Education, Helen Pledger, Department for Education

Liz Anderson, Independent Consultant – commissioned by Department for Education, Samina Ring, Raleigh Learning Trust, Carl Pattison, Flying High Multi Academy Trust and Jennifer Hardy, Project Manager. They highlighted the following points during their presentations:

- a) Since Nottingham City was identified by the Department of Education as a Priority Education Investment area work has been undertaken to build a partnership between the Council, the DoE and Multi Academy trusts across the city.
- b) A Local Partnership Board was formed in 2022 with a focus on harnessing and sharing good practice. The Board acknowledged that there are a wide range of social factors impacting education both locally and nationally but established that improvement of 2 factors, literacy and attendance would have the widest reaching impact.
- c) A consortium of local providers offering evidence based interventions around literacy bid through a tender process to provide interventions across both Nottingham and Derby. An Attendance Board was established building on the best practice work already established at the Djanogly Academy which is being delivered by the Council in partnership with the Raleigh Education Trust.

Priority Literacy

- d) The Literacy offer focuses on writing at KS2 as good results at this stage usually lead to good results in secondary education. There are two elements to the offer provided by Priority Literacy, the first, a Literacy Audit for all schools to assess their current offer and to signpost to resources and best practice where needed. The second element is a programme to encourage a culture of reading across schools and communities
- e) The Literacy Audit is completed through a self-assessment tool, that is then reviewed by literacy specialists. It establishes what tools are in place, where support is needed and signposts schools to additional resources. Instilling good practice across a wide range of schools will help to ensure that the impact of the project outlives time limited funding.
- f) Alongside the universal offer there is a target offer that identifies, through the audit process a specific menu of resources to encourage fluency in literacy and provide additional support in specific areas. Target schools are also assigned a bespoke literacy specialist to work with them to establish best practice.
- g) Following the initial audit and self-assessment the literacy specialist then checks back in with the school through the online portal at six, twelve and eighteen months to support assessment of progress. If the school achieves targets before the end of the programme, then additional work is done to further challenge them and agree additional actions to further push improvement.
- h) The Programme also aims to improve the transition between primary and secondary education by developing a consistent approach across the city, especially for more vulnerable learners.

Attendance

- i) Attendance is a national issue, and the Attendance Board is looking strategically at how it can tackle the issue. Nottingham City figures are around the national average and before the pandemic were better than the national average. The board is focusing on identifying and sharing best practice and putting children at the heart of decision making.
- j) Work of the Attendance Board is based on pilots that ran at Djanogly City Academy and Heathfield Primary that saw a 1.5% increase in attendance in one of the most diverse and challenging areas of the city. The Board aims to build a best practice toolkit that schools across the city can use to help improve attendance statistics.
- k) The Project has three planned waves, the first being a universal offer targeting pupils with an attendance of between 71 and 95% aiming to create high quality inhouse provision with best practice in place, an online toolkit, regular support meetings and improved communication across schools where siblings are involved.
- l) The first wave of work established that some schools and trusts are sharing data differently. This is now being standardised and has shown that schools are treating data differently, particularly around pupils deemed to be missing in education. Statutory guidance suggests removing those pupils from role after a certain length of time, but some schools are retaining them through concerns for safety. These pupils are tracked and monitored through other means.
- m) The second wave, planned for launch in January 2024, will see the creation of a task force of Multiagency professionals that expands on the work currently taking place through the Raleigh Learning Trust. This team will work with children where their absence puts them at heightened risk of being drawn into criminal activity.
- n) The third wave of work focuses on taking the successful model from Djanogly City Academy and boosting capacity within the Education Welfare Service to target specific wards initially to facilitate collaborative, cross-phase working between school leaders/attendance support staff and work with schools and families where attendance is below 70%. These dedicated family support workers will work with families, build a relationship and explore the barriers in place around attendance.
- o) The first wards to be targeted are Aspley, Bestwood, Bulwell, and Clifton East with a ward wide approach being taken to remove pressure from schools. Pupils with attendance between 40-70% are the target demographic for this work which equals 551 pupils.
- p) Work with this groups has been ongoing since the beginning of November 2023, with Family Support Workers working holistically as one contact for attendance for all siblings even where they attend different schools.

- q) Since the introduction of this programme in November, attendance across all 4 targeted wards is up on last year's figures and work will continue to target those children identified.

During discussion the following points were raised which attendees responded to:

- r) The Local Partnership Board and the work of the programme reports to the Department of Education (DoE) on a monthly basis that holds the Board to account for the allocation of funding and the impact of the programme. The funding from the DoE is time limited and will stop in March 2025.
- s) All schools are currently struggling with resources, particularly staff. The Programmes do not fund posts within schools but offer an easier and more convenient way to locate effective and efficient resources, which in turn has reduced some of the time pressure felt by staff. Part of the funding has been used to that schools have a range of books to encourage reading for enjoyment.
- t) The attendance programme aims to join up communication between schools where siblings are persistently absent so that there is one point of contact rather than each school contacting a family about individual children.
- u) Children considered missing from education are often tracked by a number of other services, including health services, for those with long term complex medical conditions, and children's services. Some Schools have historically not removed those children from role after the 20-day period as they have had safeguarding concerns, but in the very vast majority of cases the children will be involved with other services and all children seen as missing in education are tracked by education services.
- v) Part of the Reading for pleasure programme focuses on helping schools to establish what books children want to read, what interests them, and sparks their desire to read and how to engage with pupils to encourage reading. A big part of the programme is encouraging children to make book recommendations to friends. A recent initiative has seen a number of book donations to Nottingham City Schools focusing on depicting and representing the diverse culture within the city.
- w) There are a number of recognised barriers to attendance, including SEND diagnosis waiting times and cost of travel. In conversations with parents that have taken place since the start of the programme uniform has not come up as a significant issue, with many schools providing cheap and second-hand items for families. Travel has been highlighted as an issue particularly for primary aged children where free transport might be available for the child but not for the parent. Another issue commonly raised was housing and in particular private renting where families are moving a number of times through school life.
- x) When schools record absence there are a limited number of statutory codes they are allowed to use, with illness being one. This does not distinguish between physical and mental illness and doesn't allow schools to capture more in-depth data. A significant number of absences are around pupils mental health

and parents reluctance to send children to school when their SEND needs are not being met.

- y) The goal for the attendance programme is to raise the numbers back above national average, to levels seen in the city pre pandemic, numbers are already rising in the targeted wards and work will be further rolled out through the life of the programme. The impact of the literacy programme will not be seen as clearly in current primary age children until after the end of the programme but improved key stage 4 outcomes are the goal.
- z) Engagement across school staff and other professionals for the Priority Education programme has been enthusiastic. There is a sense of commitment and willingness to engage that has brought a sense of vigour to the work. Schools across the city are keen to build a lasting legacy from the DoE funding with a best practice tool kit and consistency across the city.
- aa) The city is very culturally diverse, and it is important that children are made to feel welcomed in schools and see that diversity reflected back. The Programme Board continues to look at how this diversity can be used and harnessed within its work as well as what specialist resources are available.
- bb) The Attendance Board has been looking at mental health as part of the holistic approach to attendance. Following Covid lockdowns some pupils have been struggling to attend school due to anxiety. Schools across the city are working to ensure that school is a welcoming and stress-free environment for children to maximise their learning. This best practise is being shared and spread from school to school.
- cc) The Council is currently developing a new Inclusion Strategy for schools. Part of this work will look at discipline in school and different approaches to ensure all pupils have equal opportunities and how exclusion is used and implemented as a late-stage measure. This strategy is due to come before this committee in the future for scrutiny.

The Chair thanked attendees for taking time to attend the meeting and for answering the questions put to them by Committee members. He commented that the dedication and commitment in those present was clear.

Resolved to:

- 1) receive the Public First Report on school attendance absenteeism;**
- 2) receive further information on support available for parents travelling with children to school; and**
- 3) receive the new Inclusion Strategy for at Committee for consideration.**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12pm to allow for a short comfort break and reconvened at 12:20pm.

22 CHILDREN SERVICES IMPROVEMENT

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education provided an update to the Committee on the progress of the Children's Services Improvement work. The following points were highlighted in discussion:

- a) A further Ofsted inspection took place on 22 and 23 November focusing on Care Leavers Services. Inspectors met with a range of staff and care leavers and also interviewed the Portfolio Holder. No grading will be given for this inspection and the full report is due to be published on the Ofsted website on 12 January 2024.
- b) Feedback from the inspectors, pending the final report, was largely positive and highlighted:
 - staff were tenacious and consistent in practice.
 - strong links with support services and specialists and care leavers mental and emotional wellbeing needs were met.
 - Strong Education, Employment and Training offers including options for further education and University.
 - Good range of suitable supported accommodation for transitioning into adulthood
 - Good learning tools were available for Personal Advisors.
- c) Areas highlighted for further focus were:
 - Consistent pathway plans ensuring that the plan has impact and continues to remain live and relevant to the individual.
 - The Dashboard is used to focus on practice management
- d) There is likely to be one further inspection between now and the end of March 2024, most likely to focus on Children in Care services.
- e) Where improvement was needed the inspection team acknowledged that work was already underway to implement change.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder, and the Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement for attending to provide an update to the Committee.

23 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the work programme highlighting the upcoming items.

Additional items were put forward by members including an item on what support schools were offering pupils around the cost of living crisis and the impact this may have on mental health. The Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer advised that there was limited space in the Committee's work programme for the current municipal year, but that it would be added as soon as possible.

Members noted the work programme.