

Lancashire County Council

Education Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 1st November, 2011 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'C' - County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Mrs Pat Case (Chair)

County Councillors

K Bailey	A Jones
K Brown	A Kay
Mrs S Derwent	A Knox
P Evans	Y Motala
S Fishwick	S Riches
C Grunshaw	C Wells
J Jackson	M Younis

Co-opted members

T Charnock	Representing RC Schools
Mrs J Hamid	Representing Parent Governors (Secondary)
K Wales	Representing Free Church Schools
J Withington	Representing Parent Governors (Primary)

County Councillor J Jackson replaced County Councillor C Evans for this meeting.

1. Appointment of a new Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee

Resolved: That the appointment by full County Council on the 21st July 2011 of County Councillor Mrs Case as Chair and County Councillor S Derwent as Deputy Chair of the Committee be noted.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor R Blow and from Mr F Kershaw (Coopted member representing CE Schools).

3. Disclosure of Personal/Prejudicial Interests.

There were no declarations of interest in relation to matters appearing on the agenda.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st June 2011

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st June 2011 be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

5. Summary of the provisional results at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 at Lancashire and District level.

Mr Hewitt, the Head of Quality and Continuous Improvement from the Directorate for Children and Young People presented a report on the overall attainment of pupils in Lancashire schools and the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 and informed the Committee that the report was based on provisional data and that validated data for primary and secondary schools was expected in December 2011 and January 2012 respectively. He also reminded the Committee that as some Lancashire schools had not taken part in tests during 2009/10 the latest figures were based on a comparison with 2008/09 results.

With regard to the 2011 Key Stage 2 results in Lancashire it was noted that overall attainment had risen when compared with the last year when all schools carried out the end of Key Stage 2 tests and was 1% above the national average at 75%. Attainment had increased in 8 out of the twelve districts in 2011 and fallen in Fylde, Lancaster, Ribble Valley and Wyre. The greatest gains were made in Preston, Rossendale and Chorley and the lowest attaining district was Pendle which was 9.2% below the Lancashire average.

In discussing the 2011 Key Stage 2 results the following points were raised.

- The importance of early intervention and preschool work in order to prepare children for the learning process in primary school and also to improve attainment.

Mr Hewitt reported that whilst many schools showed an improved rate of progress for pupils aged 7 – 11 in some districts, such as Pendle, the level of attainment on entry into Key Stage 2 was low. As a result the County Council was working to improve both pre-school and family support in order to improve the level of attainment of children before they entered Key Stage 2.

- Mr Hewitt also reported that pupil attendance at primary schools had been in decline. However, in recent years the situation had improved substantially and Lancashire had made good progress when compared to the national average and other similar local authorities. He added that the County Council would not be complacent in this area as persistent absence generally had a significant impact on the overall attainment of pupils.
- It was suggested that some Districts had large communities where English may not be the first language and that this could have an impact on

attainment. In response Mr Hewitt reported that in Pendle the County Council was working with schools and the Asian heritage community in order to encourage members of that community to engage more in the Early Years programme. He added that in areas such as Preston where minority ethnic communities were more confident in engaging with the local authority attainment was higher. It was also noted that the County Council was working with schools and local communities in order to develop strategies and share examples of best practice for improving engagement.

- With regard to Eastern European families who had settled in areas such as Burnley, Mr Hewitt reported that the transient nature of some of those families presented difficulties when providing support. The County Council was therefore working with schools in order to develop strategies which would help pupils from those communities integrate into school. It was noted that there were a number of organisations, including the Roman Catholic Church which supported Eastern European communities in Lancashire who could also have a role in supporting the families.
- It was reported that in all the schools where underperformance had been identified detailed action plans had been established in order to raise attainment in the future.

With regard to the Key Stage 4 results it was reported that overall attainment in Lancashire had risen when compared with 2010 and remained 2% above the national average. Attainment had increased in 9 of the 12 districts and had fallen in Ribble Valley, Wyre and Rossendale. The greatest gains were made in Fylde, Preston and South Ribble and Fylde was the highest attaining District overall. The Committee noted that Burnley was the lowest attaining District which was around 19% below the Lancashire average. However, the 3 schools in the Burnley Education Trust had seen an increase of around 3.5% compared with an increase of around 2.0% across Lancashire.

- In response to a query regarding the fall in attainment for areas such as Wyre, Ribble Valley and Fylde Mr Hewitt reported that these districts had relatively smaller numbers of pupils and there was in some cases a changing pattern in relation to attainment on entry. He added that for socio economic advantaged areas consideration needed to be given as to whether targets for pupil progress and attainment were sufficiently challenging. It was noted that elsewhere in the County progress for pupils from disadvantaged areas may be high, though actual attainment was not as strong.
- With regard to the fall in attainment in Rossendale Mr Hewitt confirmed that as with other districts where this was the case the County Council was working with schools and communities to improve both the level of engagement and attainment, particularly with regard to the transition from Key Stage 2 to 4. It was noted that the Teaching Schools programme, where an outstanding school takes a leading role in the training and professional development of staff at other schools in order to raise standards, was continuing to develop.

Mr Hewitt informed the meeting the Alder Grange Secondary School in Rossendale had a headteacher who had been designated as a National Leader in Education and was already working with other local schools in order to improve performance.

- Mr Hewitt reported that detailed information regarding attendance at school, absence and the attainment of pupils in relation to specific Districts would be made available to respective Children's Trusts in due course.
- Mr Hewitt informed the meeting that the DfE's removal of the role of School Improvement Partner meant the County Council no longer had a statutory role in school improvement for the vast majority of schools. However, the authority continued to have a good working relationship with schools and would continue to provide support. He added that the performance of schools was monitored through an Early Warning Group (with regard to attainment) and there was a strong tradition of schools supporting one another with more intensive support being provided by the Monitoring and Intervention Team.
- In response to a query regarding two of the same districts being shown as having falling attainment at Key Stage 2 and 4 Mr Hewitt suggested that further analysis was needed once the additional data was available.
- Some concern was expressed regarding the problems faced by parents when trying to help children with school work, particularly maths, where methods of teaching had changed significantly over the years. Mr Hewitt reported that through Best Start Lancashire all schools were able to access training on how to support parents who wished to help children at home with reading and maths.
- In response to a query regarding the availability of information on pupil attendance Mr Hewitt informed the meeting that such information was published on the Ofsted website.

Having considered the report there was general agreement amongst the members of the Committee that a further report should be presented to the next meeting when validated data and pupil led data would be available.

Resolved:

1. That a further report on the results at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 be presented to the Committee in March 2012.
2. That the report specified at 1 above to include both an analysis of the validated data and information on the attainment of specific groups of pupils which was previously unavailable.
3. That information regarding pupil attendance/exclusions from school be circulated to the members of the Committee outside of the meeting.

6. Update on the current County Council position on Academies in Lancashire

Mr Hewitt, the Head of Quality and Continuous Improvement from the Directorate for Children and Young People presented a report on the County Council's current position with regard to the development of Academies. A copy of the associated presentation is set out in the Minute Book.

It was reported that previously those schools which had been judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding' or 'good with one or more outstanding features' had been able to apply to convert to an Academy. An announcement by the Secretary of State in June 2011 had stated that the 200 primary schools which had been identified as having the weakest performance would become sponsored academies and the 500 low performing primary schools would work with the Department for Education (DfE) on structural solutions, including converting to Academies.

Mr Hewitt informed the meeting that where a school had been performing below a set standard for 5 years or more it would be included in the 200. However, there were concerns regarding this approach as the criteria for selecting the schools was not fully clear.

The Committee noted that to date 14 schools in Lancashire had converted to Academy status, on the basis of 11 secondary schools and 3 primary schools. Mr Hewitt informed the meeting that before taking any decision some Governing bodies had asked to meet with representatives of existing Academies in order to better understand the implications/benefits of conversion.

Referring to the earlier discussion on attainment Mr Hewitt reported that if the performance of any of the 14 current Academies was considered to be failing the County Council would have no responsibility for the performance of those Academies. However, the authority would be able to raise concerns with both the Secretary of State and Ofsted and ask for the Academy concerned to be investigated further.

He added that whilst the County Council would not be directly responsible for Academies it would continue to monitor their performance and the results at Key Stage 2 and 4 from Academies would form part of the overall results for Lancashire in the future.

Resolved: That the update regarding the development of Academies in Lancashire be noted and that further reports be presented to future meetings of the Committee as appropriate.

7. Children in Care - Progress on Attainment

Sue Parr, Senior Manager & Associate Headteacher of Virtual School for Children looked After, from the Alternative and Complementary Education and Residential Services (ACERS) presented a report on the attainment of children in care in Lancashire as measured by performance in national Curriculum Key Stage tests and GCSE results in summer 2011.

It was reported that for most measures the attainment of children in Lancashire had improved though it was still well below the level of attainment for children generally.

Ms Parr informed the meeting that whilst having been in post for only a short period she had examined the current service provision and proposed to take forward a number of changes, including

- A complete audit and review of the existing Virtual School provision in order to set new priorities.
- Better targeting of funding in the future.
- A redefinition of the role for consultants.
- Improvements to the quality of data regarding children in care
- A review of monitoring and evaluation of children in care with progress being monitored on a termly basis in the future.
- Challenging some schools in relation to pupil progress and also with regard to how funding is used.
- Improve working relationship with partners, including foster carers and residential care.

In considering the report members of the Committee made the following observations.

- There was a need to improve how information was gathered in relation to children in care in order to increase the cohort and move away from the current position which was felt presented a skewed picture.
- Information should be gathered in relation to those children in care who progressed in Further/Higher Education. In response Ms Parr agreed that this information would be important and suggested that in future it would form part of longitudinal studies relating to children in care. It was also noted that whilst bursaries were available for children in care who went into Further and Higher Education information regarding those children and their progress was limited.
- With reference to Ms Parr's earlier comment about challenging some schools regarding pupil progress/funding there was some concern regarding the apparent lack of accountability for schools in relation to the funding for and attainment of children in care, particularly in relation to Academies. In response Ms Parr stated that the authority would be responsible for children in care and would be able to request information regarding the use of funding and attainment from schools and Academies.

- In response to a query about the tracking the outcomes for Children in care Ms Parr informed the meeting that the authority would continue to work with designated officers in schools in order to monitor the progress of children through their education.
- Concern was expressed in connection with the number of children in care with disabilities and the need for them to be monitored in terms of attainment and improvement. It was also suggested that training was needed for foster carers so that they would be able to also provide support in connection with children's educational needs.
- The previous reduction in the number of Educational Psychologists was mentioned and it was suggested that this may have an impact on their ability to undertake regular checks on children in care. Ms Parr informed the meeting that following a recent meeting with Educational Psychologists it had been agreed that in future all children in care who were at risk of poor outcomes would now be treated as a higher priority than before.
- The prioritisation of looked after children in relation to school admissions was raised and it was suggested that whilst children were treated as a priority there could still be problems in terms of them achieving an actual place at the preferred school.
- With regard to the number of looked after children from outside Lancashire it was suggested that the figure of 34 was lower than expected. In response Ms Parr stated she would look into the figure to establish whether it was accurate and confirmed that she was aware of a previous overview and Scrutiny Task Group report on this area.

Resolved: That a further report be presented to the meeting in March to update the Committee on progress made in relation to improvements to services for children in care.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business for consideration at the meeting.

9. Date of the Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee would be held at 10.00am on the 13th March 2012 in Cabinet Room 'C' at County Hall.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston