

Children and Young People Select Committee Supplementary Agenda

Thursday, 6 December 2018

7.00 pm

Civic Suite

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This meeting is an open meeting and all items on the agenda may be audio recorded and/or filmed.

Part 1

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Visit to Prendergast Ladywell School - 27 November 2018

1. Councillors Luke Sorba, John Paschoud, Jacq Paschoud, Monsignor Rotheron and the Scrutiny Manager met Tolu Ladejobi - Assistant Head and Access and Inclusion lead, Dave Sheppard - Executive Head of the Leathersellers Federation, Niall Hand – Head teacher of Prendergast Ladywell School (secondary).
2. Prendergast Ladywell School is a 5-16 all through inclusive school located in Ladywell Fields, SE4. The secondary school building is approximately 10-11 years old and was built as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. The primary school was completed around 5 years ago and has filled up from Reception. The oldest year group currently is Year 4.
3. The school is an improving school which has secured improved outcomes for students for the last four years. Attendance is above national average. The school has high numbers of pupils with Special Educational Needs. Currently, 14 students have an EHCP and around 100 children are categorised as SEN-K. This means they have a diagnosed SEN but no EHCP, but needing additional support that is provided as part of the school's usual curriculum. The school experiences significant numbers of children transitioning from primary to secondary school that have educational or mental health needs that have been managed in the primary school, but present challenges for the school as they move to secondary.
4. The school also has significant numbers of children with mental health needs, of parents with mental health needs, and in any one term makes around 100 safeguarding referrals. In the last academic year the school had 29 students identified as a Child In Need (CIN) or on a Child Protection (CP) Plan. The high CAMHS threshold, and lack of clarity around what the threshold is, means that most referrals are batted back to the school to deal with. The school serves some of the most disadvantaged communities in Lewisham.
5. Children are rarely excluded for a one-off event, and any decision to exclude has to balance the needs of that child with the need to keep the school community safe. This is set out in the statutory guidance. There is no checklist for permanent exclusion – each case is considered on its own facts, and taking into account the child's whole school record. The Headteacher makes a considered judgement about the whole of a child's record before permanently excluding.
6. Governors strongly challenge any decision to exclude. No child that is permanently excluded is an unknown. The school prepares an exclusion 'pack' which includes a complete history of the child's school career - behaviour records, interventions, witness statements, details of trips, clubs, academic attainment etc. These packs have been held up as an example of good practice by the local authority. The school's process and paperwork is fully compliant with the statutory guidance. There have been no recent appeals against the school's decision to exclude.
7. The school saw a link between high levels of off-rolling and low exclusions: some other boroughs with lower exclusion rates than Lewisham have schools identified by Ofsted as having high numbers of churn between the start of year 10 and the January census in year 11. This is referred to as 'off-rolling'. This figure for each school is now reported annually and challenged by Ofsted Inspectors.
8. The school told us that children that are permanently excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion are 'the tip of the iceberg'. There are many children in the school who are vulnerable and whose behaviour is not far behind those facing permanent exclusion,

and there is a wider issue about resources for supporting these children. The school suggested it does considerable work to prevent children from being permanently excluded and leaving school with qualifications for the next phase.

9. The school sees good safeguarding and SEN practice as effective preventative measures. For a period of 12-18 months, school based police officers had been an intermittent service. This service has recently been restored. The head reported that all the preventative work that the police had been doing stalled and fell away. Around 3 months ago the police stepped up, which the school was happy about. The school has a clear behaviour policy that is explained to the children. This message is reinforced by the police who help vulnerable children to understand the consequences of decisions and to be accountable.
10. A common challenge for the school is lack of effective intervention by primary schools to support children with family problems. The school works to make the most vulnerable stay in school and achieve in school, and has 2 designated members of staff working with most vulnerable students and families, recognising that the family is part of the child. Working with families has helped to reduce persistent absenteeism. Attendance has improved to 96% currently.
11. A significant frustration for the school comes from dealing with Early Help (Children's Social Care). In the school's experience, thresholds are unclear and too high, services are unresponsive, and in 70% of cases where the school identifies a young person as in desperate need of support, they are turned away for not meeting the threshold. Urgent appointments can mean a 3 month wait. "If early help isn't working well enough there's only so much a school can do". CAMHS and social workers need to be more efficient, and clearly understand and explain their thresholds and their responses if children do not meet thresholds. It was the school's experience that Lewisham thresholds generally are higher than the rest of London, and recommended comparing MASH referral thresholds for Lewisham with London.
12. Members heard an example of a boy that the school had been concerned about for 2 years. They had referred to the MASH and brought in external support for him. His school attendance had been weak, he had been missing from school and the family homes for periods of time, and his engagement in school was low when he was there. Despite these indicators that he was involved in county lines, the MASH referral was knocked back to the school because they wanted concrete evidence of gang activity. The school was unable to provide evidence of what happens outside of school. The school's spot checks and intelligence-led searches had not found any weapons or drugs on him in school. Were the school to find drugs or knives on him, he would be considered for permanent exclusion and this would likely be upheld by the governors as the evidence shows YOS involvement, interventions, poor attendance and the range of other preventative interventions which had been put in place. The school explained that this was not an unusual case and such cases are routinely bounced back to schools.
13. Situations like this are routinely bounced back to schools, Members heard, and there is a non-alignment between schools and social workers or where the threshold lies, fuelled by social worker caseloads being too high, and pressure to create savings.
14. The school shared that the impression parents have of Abbey Manor (AM) college is not a provision parents have confidence in, but that the school has the sense that in the last year or so that AM is improving slowly. Often, parents accept the school's decision that their child should be excluded but they plead not to send their child to AM as they have heard it is attended by numbers of children they consider will influence their children negatively. Some PRUs in other boroughs have a better parental reputation as a place

for intensive therapeutic intervention to prevent exclusion. SILS Southwark and a purpose build facility in Wandsworth were given as examples. The school had experience of sending children to AM that had fared worse there because of associations with the other students they have met there. Some children are seen as too vulnerable to go to AM and are being put into alternative provision.

15. It was the school's experience that the Lewisham Early Help team is under resourced and has to contract out family work. Core Assets is a bought in service where an external social worker works through issues with the family to look at the child's risky behaviour. It operates on a compliance model, so if the child or family say they are not interested, even if they do reach the threshold to access this support, they may choose not to engage. Engagement is difficult with troubled families.
16. The school tries to offer the support of an AP placement within the school, using its Pupil Premium funding to fund a full time school counsellor, a full time safeguarding officer, 2 x home/school link officers, 3 x full time inclusion officers and one full time learning mentor, as well as providing staff training. This resource decision must be balanced against the limited and declining budgets in schools.
17. The school has raised GCSE outcomes year on year. School is seen as a place of safety. Much of what the school experiences is "societal problems". School improvement cannot address what is going on outside of school eg overcrowding, problems with housing, temporary accommodation, children being used as weapons in tension between parents, single parent families where the parent is working several jobs so the child is not being supervised and is therefore vulnerable to exploitation, poverty – a high percentage of students are eligible for Free School Meals and there is a growing number of students with no recourse to public funds.
18. School finishes at 3pm, but stays open until 4:30pm so students can use the library, attend extracurricular clubs, engage with interventions. School opens early to accept pupils. There is a PFI restriction on opening hours. Students are encouraged to go straight home and not to loiter in the park or go to Lewisham or Catford as 4-6pm is a time when young people are most at risk. Youth First deliver assemblies and work with Y10 and 11. The school communicates the message to parents that their child's mobile phone should be their business, not private as they pay the bills, and that they should ensure their child is coming straight home at the end of the day.
19. The school sends children out on Managed Moves (MM) and receives new students on MM, usually for 6 weeks in first instance, but sometimes extended to 9 weeks. In any one year the school might see around 5 MM going out, and 7 or 8 coming in. Fair Access Panel (FAP) holds these records for all of Lewisham.
20. The school supports a variance in approach to incidents involving weapons as a hypothetical example a Y7 student with a small penknife with no intention to use it would be considered differently to a Y10 with gang affiliation carrying a large kitchen knife where there was evidence of intention. First and foremost the school has to be safe and give the clear message that knives (bladed weapons under the act) have no place in school.
21. It was the school's view that any attempt to move towards a public health model before systemic restructuring and investment in the services the LA has authority over would risk the improvements made in the safety of schools and the outcomes for young people because the public health model requires highly flexible, efficient and effective services directed at young people which specifically address their needs

22. As a final point, the Executive Head shared that extra capacity in Lewisham's secondary schools was leaving the schools vulnerable to egress from other boroughs. Large Lewisham schools have high PANs. Local boroughs are aware that there is under capacity in some Lewisham schools. Lewisham's FAP threshold is lower than Southwark's and Bromley's, as examples. Therefore there is a good understanding at parent school and borough level that children who need intensive, resource-heavy support, will be offered a place in a Lewisham school. By contrast, Southwark's and Bromley's schools are oversubscribed. He advocated for reducing the PAN where there are large numbers of empty places in a school to give the schools control over their in year admissions. The Admissions Code allows schools to accept cohorts over PAN without consultation so reducing the PAN does not inhibit schools' capacity to grow successfully.
23. The schools put the view to the enquiry that the CYP Select Committee was responsible for and has, through Mayor and Council, authority over a number of services to schools which directly impacted on exclusions: Abbey Manor College, New Woodlands, services to schools for SEND, Inclusion, Admissions, FAP (which is managed through protocols), finance, youth inclusion services, social work services, safeguarding services. The LA also has a commissioning role in public health areas and critically in relation to CAMHS services. Improving the effectiveness of these services was an essential first step before there was any progression to a public health solution that would have positive outcomes for young people.