

# MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Luke Warner (Vice-Chair), Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, Jacq Paschoud, Clive Caseley and Monsignor N Rother.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Yemisi Anifowose and Jack Lavery.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services), Anthony Doudle (Head of Lewisham Learning), Ruth Griffiths (Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation) and Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager).

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY:

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

## Introduction

The Committee agreed that Kehinde Onasanya and Morgan Seward, Young Advisors, and Susan Rowe, Lewisham Education Group, be given speaking rights for the duration of the meeting.

### 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023

- 1.1. The Chair noted that a budget savings item had been scheduled for the Committee's November meeting but removed by the Committee in September as savings proposals were not anticipated. However, in December, a set of savings proposals were published. The Chair had asked for relevant proposals to be brought to this meeting but had been informed that was not procedurally possible.
- 1.2. In lieu of formal scrutiny, the Chair and Vice-Chair met with the Cabinet Member and Executive Director for Children and Young People on 5 January to discuss those savings proposals.
- 1.3. The Chair had submitted a report based on the aforementioned meeting to the 23 January meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which was to review the Council's budget savings proposals.
- 1.4. The Scrutiny Manager was to circulate the Chair's report to the Committee.

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.

## **2. Declarations of interest**

### **RESOLVED**

That the following declaration be noted:

- Re item 4, Cllr Paschoud declared that she was a Trust Governor of Watergate School.

## **3. Tackling Race Inequality in Lewisham Schools**

### **Witnesses**

Cllr Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Angela Scattergood, Director of Education Services

Anthony Doudle, Head of Lewisham Learning

Ruth Griffiths, Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation

### **Key points from discussion**

The witnesses introduced the report. Key points included:

- 3.1. Tackling Race Inequality in Lewisham Schools was a three-year programme launched in 2021, during the height of covid recovery. It existed within a broader focus on ethnicity and the development of anti-racist practice in other council services.
- 3.2. All Lewisham schools had signed the pledge to tackle race inequality and racism.
- 3.3. There were some “green shoots” of progress re outcomes, but the impact of the programme’s four strands was not yet proved.
- 3.4. Issues needed to be considered in the national context – particularly the challenges faced by the Black Caribbean community – and lack of obvious national focus on improvement.
- 3.5. The level of intent regarding tackling race inequality varied across London, but inter-borough collaboration was being undertaken.
- 3.6. The 35 schools whose governing bodies had not participated in Governors Toolkit training had variable outcomes for Black Caribbean pupils; the Head of Lewisham Learning was to encourage them to complete the training.
- 3.7. The impact of the Governors Toolkit and how it was being used needed to be reviewed.
- 3.8. While the diversity of governing bodies had increased, more needed to be done.
- 3.9. Curricula were strong, as reflected in 94 per cent of schools being rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, whose current framework intensively scrutinised the quality of education, including the diversity of persons pupils were exposed to through the curriculum. However, there had not yet been time for this to have been the case for the significant proportions of older pupils’ educations and improve their outcomes.
- 3.10. Schools’ efforts to tackle race inequality had been made an explicit area of focus for Lewisham Learning’s improvement work. School leaders were now

describing their efforts in their Autumn improvement reports, which were to be followed up on in the Spring and Summer terms.

- 3.11. Case studies on the impact of the community conversations delivered in 17 schools needed to be produced. Two participating schools had improved outcomes for Black Caribbean pupils. The purpose of community conversations and how communities could be supported to increase attendance at school needed to be explored.
- 3.12. Significant work had been undertaken re suspensions and exclusions. Work regarding behaviour policies continued.

The Committee and its guests put questions to the witnesses. Key points included:

- 3.13. To increase attendance, in addition to community conversations, schools were supported to implement new Department for Education guidance re attendance; and Improvement Advisors were to use data to focus conversations with schools on the groups requiring the most attention and to identify patterns relating to individuals, e.g. often absent on a specific day.
- 3.14. The 87 per cent of Lewisham Schools who subscribed to the Council's Attendance Service received support re absence, particularly persistent and severe absence. Increased multi-agency support for the families of persistently or severely absent children was available. Attendance officers and schools worked with the families of persistently or severely absent children through a process to understand why those children were absent.
- 3.15. Persistent absence frequently resulted from children's mental health issues, familial poverty and mental health, and, since the pandemic, increased school refusal.
- 3.16. Permanent exclusion could follow from persistent disruptive behaviour, which it was recognised could be a form of communication. The Access, Inclusion and Participation service challenged schools on whether they were picking up problematic behaviour earlier and supporting young people's additional needs. It was also reviewing suspensions of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to identify where preventative interventions could have been delivered. However, in the case of one-off incidents breaching behaviour policies, the Service and Governors were able to challenge the exclusion. The service could support the young person if the exclusion was upheld.
- 3.17. With Violence Reduction Unit funding, the Council had recently launched a three-year pilot in ten schools to develop oracy among the youngest pupils. It was hoped this would result in reduced speech and language therapy referrals and participants being better able to regulate their emotions, reducing suspensions and exclusions. Contingency funding was being held to enable the programme to be expanded to a further ten schools.
- 3.18. Susan Rowe suggested community groups be involved in supporting Black families to increase their children's attendance and that technology, such as artificial intelligence chat bots, could be used to support children and families.
- 3.19. Community conversations – which were critical, crucial and sometimes difficult – had been taking place. Their future form and participants required consideration.
- 3.20. The independence of schools meant there was not a borough-wide mechanism for community engagement. Some schools independently conducted effective community engagement. How community engagement

- by schools could be instigated and enabled by the Council was to be considered, as was how the seldom heard could be better involved.
- 3.21. It was expected that Key Stage 2 attainment would improve next year. The most recent round of SATs had predominantly assessed knowledge pupils were expected to acquire in Years 3 and 4, i.e. during the pandemic for the most recent Year 6s. The School Improvement Service met with Year 6 teachers termly to unpick issues and share approaches to improve attainment. School Improvement Partners were tasked with discussing with school leaders their improvement strategies for all, and particularly underperforming, cohorts of pupils.
  - 3.22. Year 2 tests were no longer statutorily required. The Council was working with schools regarding what they could do in that year to obtain the data required to formulate and implement improvement strategies.
  - 3.23. How training which differentiated between Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Emotional Well-being and Mental Health could be delivered was being considered following the behaviour policy audit. The Council needed to work consensually with school communities. A large conference incorporating such training and a programme of training for further rollout was an option.
  - 3.24. There was an aspiration to challenge zero-tolerance behaviour policies and promote a graduated response in schools.
  - 3.25. It was important for schools to listen to the communities, as well as disseminate information. Community conversations were labour intensive for schools; how they could be incorporated in regular conversations with parents needed to be considered.
  - 3.26. The Governors Toolkit was developed by a group of Lewisham governors from diverse ethnic backgrounds, which involved discussion of the nature of governing body meetings and their experiences of being governors from such backgrounds. The Toolkit was a means for governing bodies to hold themselves to account for tackling race inequality, their diversity, and how inclusive and accessible their meetings were to people of all protected characteristics. It was noted that a role of governing bodies was to engage with communities outside of schools.
  - 3.27. The number of electively home educated learners had returned to pre-pandemic levels. Since 2010, the longer-term trend was an increase in elective home education.
  - 3.28. Why White and Black Caribbean dual-heritage pupils' attainment remained trenchantly low was challenged. There had been an insufficient focus on them previously. Ofsted was giving less weight to outcomes under its current framework than previous versions. School improvement partners were focusing on outcomes more since examinations were reintroduced. School leaders needed to be challenged over how they were tracking and supporting pupils, how they were engaging families, and how they were addressing attendance. The relatively small number of children of White and Black Caribbean dual heritage made it theoretically easier for schools to track and support them.
  - 3.29. Realism was required regarding how long it would take to deliver significant change and the implications of national government policy for the groups Lewisham was focusing on, as demonstrated by their disproportionately low outcomes at the national level.

- 3.30. It was imperative to show young people who had not performed well in school that there were legitimate career options that didn't require GCSEs.
- 3.31. Grouping all black ethnicities together did not reflect their plurality of cultures and values, and could lead to the misdirection of interventions.

#### **ACTION**

1. Director of Education Services to share academic research presented to schools re how culture intersects with various factors resulting in unequal schooling experiences.

#### **4. School Place Planning Update**

##### **Witnesses**

Cllr Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Angela Scattergood, Director of Education Services

Ruth Griffiths, Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation

##### **Key points from discussion**

The witnesses introduced the report. Key points included:

- 4.1. The preference for Lewisham secondary schools was increasing.
- 4.2. In-borough special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) placements were increasing.
- 4.3. Falling birth rates, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic were key factors in the reduced number of families with children in the borough.
- 4.4. A wider pupil planning strategy was being developed.

The Committee put questions to the witnesses. Key points raised included:

- 4.5. In response to falling primary school rolls, the Council had been working with schools to reduce their admissions numbers through determined arrangements.
- 4.6. Temporarily capping pupil numbers, rather than changing published admission numbers (PANs), was the most common approach to varying school capacity. Capping allowed schools to respond to demand, including from in-year applications, without the involved process of varying a PAN.
- 4.7. The Council's school finance team worked with schools which were likely to be challenged by the lower funding attracted by lower pupil numbers. A comprehensive support package was available through de-delegated funding. School deficits remained within the Dedicated Schools Grant and could not be charged to the general fund.
- 4.8. It was suggested that, if smaller schools were to be sustained, it could be necessary in the future for larger schools to admit fewer pupils. However, the Department for Education did not support reducing the size of popular/over-subscribed schools.
- 4.9. The London-wide admissions forum discussed the implications of falling pupil numbers. London Councils had lobbied the Department for Education regarding the associated issues.
- 4.10. Recent events had been held to promote Lewisham secondary schools. More promotion should be undertaken.

- 4.11. Where school buildings had surplus capacity, it was being used to introduce resource bases and alternative provision for local children.
- 4.12. In response to the oversubscription of secondary schools, caps had been raised in the past two years, as this was more financially effective than adjusting PANs.
- 4.13. In cases of oversubscription, families were accepting places at 'less-popular' secondary schools and keeping their children enrolled in them.
- 4.14. No school closures were currently planned.
- 4.15. Some schools had had to review staffing structures due to reduced pupil numbers, which had resulted in redundancies.

**ACTION**

- 1. Director of Education Services to share the guiding principles for the pupil place planning strategy with the Committee once appropriate.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**5. Update on Adventure Playground Services Procurement**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**6. Family Hubs and Start for Life Update**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**7. Select Committee work programme**

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.11 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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