

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

THURSDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Catherine Del Campo, Stuart Carroll (Chair) and David Coppinger (Vice-Chairman)

Also in attendance: Gemma Donnelly, Lindsay O'Connell, Sarah Cottle, Pamela O'Brien, Nick Hart, Tricia Opalko, Alison Fox and Frances Walsh

Officers: Andy Carswell, Kevin McDaniel and Clive Haines

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on June 26th 2019 be agreed as an accurate record.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECTS TO SUPPORT PUPILS IN RECEIPT OF ADDITIONAL FUNDING AS A RESULT OF LOW INCOME

Members were told that Claire Murray and Helen Daniels had been leading the network meetings for Pupil Premium Champions. These focused on sharing research on quality first teaching strategies, sharing good practice, and sharing in-school Pupil Premium documents. Feedback had been very positive and up to 30 schools had been represented at meetings. The Forum was told that participants had submitted data for analysis, developed an understanding of barriers and how to address them and measure impact and used Specialist Leaders of Education to further develop classroom practice.

Lindsay O'Connell told the Forum that a Pupil Premium project based on the Early Years Foundation Stage was now into its fourth year. There had been an improvement in the level of development in the last academic year; the good level of development had risen from 46 per cent to 55 per cent. However the Forum was told that this level was still below the national average, despite the improvements. A total of 14 schools had engaged with the project and strong links had been made with 12 of them. It was noted that the schools that had not engaged with the programme tended to have smaller numbers of Pupil Premium children. It was also noted that the number of disadvantaged pupils was low, due to the Royal Borough being an area of low financial disadvantage.

The Director of Children's Services stated it made sense for staff to go on training courses to learn about Pupil Premium management, and that a whole school approach was best. Tricia Opalko stated her belief that the main reason for being disadvantaged was thought to be poverty at home, and it was felt that whole school training was the most effective way to narrow the poverty gap. Sarah Cottle told the Forum that the focus had been on schools with larger numbers of Pupil Premium children rather than those with just one or two children. However it was noted that it had been difficult to get certain schools to engage with the programme.

The Chairman suggested that all headteachers should be written to, inviting them to the Pupil Premium training. Members agreed that this would be a sensible course of action. The Chairman stated his belief that a number of good ideas were being proposed at the programme working groups, but these were not always being conveyed to all of the schools.

Action: For all headteachers to be contacted and invited to Pupil Premium training.

The Schools Leadership Development Manager gave a short presentation about a Pupil Premium Summer Camp that had taken place at the start of the school summer holidays. He said that 84 children had attended the three-day camp, and they had been grouped according to where they would be transitioning to secondary school in September. Support had been provided in part by Sixth Form pupils. The Schools Leadership Development Manager said that many of the pupils who had attended would not have the opportunity of going away elsewhere during the summer break. Places on the camp had been paid for through sponsorship.

Members asked if it was possible for free passes for certain activities to be given to Pupil Premium families to use during the summer, and Cllr Del Campo asked if it was possible for the camps to be reconvened at the end of the summer. However the Forum was advised that unfortunately there was no resource for this, and in addition arranging transport to events was difficult.

UPDATE ON COLLABORATIVE WORK TO SUPPORT PUPIL PREMIUM CHILDREN

Gemma Donnelly told the Forum that Braywick Court School's admissions criteria had been rewritten, with a criterion for admission to Pupil Premium children being given higher priority. This move had been inspired in part by a previous school she had worked at in Reading, where up to 70 per cent of children were on Pupil Premium. There was a campaign supported by central government to provide assistance to out of work families.

The Forum was told that attainment rates of pupils in the Royal Borough were ahead of national averages in all areas apart from those of disadvantaged children. The exception to this was at Key Stage 4 and the Director of Children's Services suggested there was something that could be learned from in order to improve attainment rates amongst other pupils.

Gemma Donnelly told the Forum that each school in the Royal Borough had been asked to nominate a Pupil Premium Champion, in order to share good practice. Feedback from talks between the nominated staff had led to a proposal to give better admissions priority to Pupil Premium children, in the same way that looked after children were. This would enable Pupil Premium children to have greater opportunities in education and demonstrate the Council's support for them. Gemma Donnelly told the Forum that admissions to Pupil Premium children was category 4 at Braywick Court and category 5 at Holyport, but there was no reference to Pupil Premium in most schools' admissions criteria.

Tricia Opalko asked if this policy would impact on school transport arrangements. Gemma Donnelly stated that this had been taken into account and in most cases Pupil Premium children would be in a position to be able to walk to school, although this did vary from school to school. It was noted that there was a tendency for parents to become disengaged from a school if the one they were allocated was a long way from their home address. The Forum was told that parents were often not aware they were eligible for Pupil Premium funding and it was a priority to identify these families and encourage them to apply for funding. One way of doing this was through looking at the free childcare funding that became available at the age of two at nursery.

The Schools Leadership Development Manager advised the Forum that 11 schools in the Royal Borough had 20 per cent or more Pupil Premium children on roll. These children tended to come from families on low incomes in affluent areas. However there were also a number of

schools that had a very low number of Pupil Premium children on roll, and often these parents felt they stood out more and felt less confident about applying for help or engaging with the Council. Gemma Donnelly stated that her experience at Braywick Court showed that parents felt more accepted if they were able to apply for a school place under the Pupil Premium admissions category.

Cllr Del Campo noted that social factors contributed to a school's ability to achieve a good or outstanding Ofsted assessment, and that dispersing a particularly challenging demographic across a wide range of schools did not necessarily lead to those pupils receiving a better education. She asked if it was easier for teachers to handle a higher concentration of pupils with challenging needs in one school, and if there was any evidence to support this hypothesis. During discussions arising from this question, Forum members stated that in their experience the negative impacts tended to be on the parents themselves rather than the children as they felt less confident around other parents. Sometimes this would be because of their own negative experience of school as a child. There was a belief that families would be more confident and comfortable if they could apply for a school under a Pupil Premium admission criterion. However Cllr Del Campo stated that there needed to be more evidence to show that moving disadvantaged children out of their local areas worked, and that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. She highlighted that a lot of additional journeys were potentially being created, as there would be a need for reciprocal movements if children from certain areas were allocated to schools in a different area. The discussions appeared to indicate that Pupil Premium children could be better provided for in a larger group of such children, but more work was required to ensure its effectiveness. Cllr Del Campo highlighted the fact that schools in more disadvantaged areas probably had more skills in dealing with pupils' challenges, but also asked for more evidence to support the claim that giving parents more choice made them more invested in their children's education.

In addition Forum members stated that it was more of a challenge to provide for Pupil Premium children in schools which had small cohorts of such children; in some cases there may only be one or two pupil premium children on roll. The Forum was told that on average Pupil Premium children would be 18 months to three years behind their peers in terms of learning by the time they joined secondary school. However specialist subjects and facilities – for example, drama studios – at secondary schools enabled Pupil Premium children to catch up more rapidly.

The Chairman said the proposals were interesting, although more consultation with schools was needed. Members agreed for the proposals to be discussed at the next BASH meeting in January and other school cluster meetings, and for a paper to be prepared.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.21 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....