

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

TUESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2021

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

Also in attendance: Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Karen Davies, Councillor Shamsul Shelim, Councillor Amy Tisi, Sarah Cottle, Helen Daniels and Andrew Morrison

Officers: Clive Haines, Kevin McDaniel, Fatima Rehman and Mark Beeley

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

IMPACT OF HOME LEARNING ACROSS THE BOROUGH

The Chairman said that he had spoken to various Head teachers from across the borough and was very impressed at the quality of remote learning that was currently being offered to pupils.

Helen Daniels gave a presentation on the background to remote learning and what was being offered by schools. There were a number of different definitions of remote learning and it did not always mean digital. A common myth was that it was a different way of teaching children but the skills remained the same and the curriculum was still taught.

Councillor Shelim joined the meeting.

During the first lockdown there was a variation on the curriculum being taught with the main difference now being the way remote learning was being delivered. Learning platforms like Microsoft Teams were now being utilised to deliver live and recorded lessons and training had also evolved. One of the key concerns from the first lockdown was attendance and ensuring that children of all abilities were still engaged with their learning but this had now moved on to ensuring that children were still being stretched academically and provided support for any work that they needed extra help with. The subject curriculum had in some cases been adapted to focus on important knowledge concepts. The quality of the teaching was the most important thing rather than the medium used and this included making sure that children were receiving feedback and assessment on their work.

It was clear from the progress of remote teaching so far that concentration was generally shorter online than it was in the classroom, which led to greater challenges with motivating and engaging pupils. Communicating and working with parents was also important to ensure that they were supported in helping their children gain the most from remote learning.

The Chairman asked how teacher training for remote learning could be improved by the Department of Education and also how parental support could be improved.

Helen Daniels said that teachers had done well but it was always useful to have extra training provided. Some smaller schools which did not have extensive IT knowledge were helped by the boroughs bigger secondary schools to get them set up to deliver remote teaching, which had been hugely appreciated.

Councillor Del Campo asked how learning was being delivered to pupils who did not have access to a device.

Helen Daniels said that she would answer this question when she updated the Forum on her own schools experience of remote learning.

Sarah Cottle gave an update on her perspective of remote learning at nursery level. The nursery had opened to all families who wanted their child to attend and was currently operating at 50% capacity. Lessons were filmed and then uploaded to the website where they could then be accessed by parents, with group time and activities all part of the content provided. Doing the recordings helped parents to manage with their daily lives and many parents had emailed in things that had been done so communication with parents was still very strong. Staff had been working hard to ensure that activities and lessons were of a high quality and accessible to all pupils.

The Chairman asked if the technology was working well.

Sarah Cottle said that staff had learned quickly by filming, recording, editing and uploading lessons. Parents had benefited from visually seeing how to access resources to help their children.

Councillor Del Campo asked about the 50% capacity that the nursery was currently operating at, whether this was the limit set or if that was all the children of parents that wanted to attend.

Sarah Cottle said it was all children whose parents had chosen for them to go back.

Helen Daniels gave the Forum an update on remote learning from a primary school perspective. 'Seesaw' was an online platform that was used to take photos of work and share with parents. Work could be set and pupils could also submit work where teachers could provide verbal or written feedback. Zoom was being used for reception and Key Stage 1, with a mix of key learning and other activities across the day. Key Stage 2 were taught using Microsoft Teams, with part of each hour long lesson being taught. However, it had been difficult to teach 30 children through a screen. A new approach was for a teacher to teach five 20 minute segments in smaller groups which had improved engagement. Packs had been sent home to children with equipment and resources, for example whiteboards, which could be used in conjunction with online remote teaching. At Cookham Rise Primary School, approximately 20% of pupils were currently attending school. There was support for parents and they had found it useful to have work set in advance so that they could plan better. A range of workshops had also been run to help parents support their child's learning.

Regarding the question from Councillor Del Campo earlier in the meeting about access to devices, Helen Daniels said that it was really important that children had access. All children at Cookham Rise now had access to a device, with some devices loaned out from the school and the Spoore, Merry and Rixman Foundation had also kindly purchased some devices for use.

Councillor Coppinger commented that he was a trustee of the Spoore, Merry and Rixman Foundation and was pleased that they had been able to help.

Andrew Morrison gave an update to the Forum from a secondary school perspective. His school were currently providing five 50 minute lessons a day which had allowed pupils to have some routine. When schools reopened in September after the first lockdown, it was evident that many pupils lacked a good routine and this was something that they wanted to ensure continued in the current lockdown. During each lesson, the teacher would usually only teach for part of the allocated time which would allow time for pupils to do some independent work with the teacher being in the call to provide help or support if needed. Staff were continuing to teach the curriculum but it was a broad approach and was much easier to monitor things like progress in the classroom. Phone calls were being made to parents to keep them updated and ensure that progress was being made. There had been a lack of parity for exam year groups, especially as Year 11 had missed the majority of a year's education.

In terms of numbers attending school, Andrew Morrison said that he had around 10 at the start of the first lockdown which rose to 50 by the summer. This time there was around 30/40 pupils regularly attending school out of a total of 1,400. A large amount of IT hardware had been loaned out to pupils while training had also been provided for parents. It was also important to consider the impact on staff who had been doing a significant amount of extra work to make sure that remote learning was a success.

The Chairman asked if there were any strategies that could be implemented to 'close the gap' and ensure that pupils were still being taught as much of the curriculum as possible.

Andrew Morrison said that teaching in smaller groups had been beneficial but this required extra resources so was challenging to deliver regularly.

Councillor Del Campo said that the performance gap was across all schools and therefore everyone was in the same boat. She asked what the Forum could do to help bridge the gap.

Councillor Tisi asked how teachers felt about the guidelines that the government had produced. She also asked what their views were on the proposed plans to catch up lost time with things like summer schools and longer school days which had been suggested.

Helen Daniels said that a longer school day was not the answer. There should be a focus on the core skills and also on physical activities. It was important that children were happy both socially and educationally.

Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services, agreed that the school day should not be extended. There would need to be a long term recovery plan that included education, wellbeing and socialising, all of which should involve enjoyable activities.

Andrew Morrison said that it was easy to focus on the academic side of things but things like enrichment clubs were hugely important to development and wellbeing.

Kevin McDaniel mentioned that the collaboration between schools throughout the pandemic had been tremendous and he thanked all staff who had made an amazing difference to remote learning. These comments were echoed by the Chairman.

Councillor Del Campo said that it had been a good meeting but asked what would happen going forwards and what actions would be taken from the discussion.

The Chairman said that he currently liaising with the Department of Education and had spoken with a number of schools from across RBWM. The Chairman had also spoken with parents and pupils to really understand what they would like to see going forwards. Feedback would be collaborated with the government and the Chairman said that he would be writing a letter to Gavin Williamson, the Minister for Education, to voice his issues on support for children and concerns around mental health. There was a positive legacy as remote learning could be utilised when required going forward. The Chairman suggested that he would like to see a tier

system for schools that could reopen safely with clear criteria and guidance set out by the government.

Councillor Del Campo suggested that it would be good to see a copy of the letter being sent to Gavin Williamson.

The Chairman explained that it was in draft form currently but would be shared with members of the Forum once it was ready.

The Chairman concluded by thanking all teachers and school staff for their ongoing work and also to everyone who attended the meeting for sharing their experiences of remote teaching.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place in June 2021, with the exact date to be confirmed in due course.

The Chairman said that there would potentially be another meeting of the Forum before June if it was required.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.05 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....