

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 24 JUNE 2020

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Maureen Hunt, Councillor Lynne Jones, Councillor Neil Knowles, Councillor Gurch Singh, Helen Daniels, Claire Murray, Helen Huntley, Joanne Heffer, Matthew Newberry and Sarah Cottle

Officers: Clive Haines, Fatima Rehman and Mark Beeley

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Kevin McDaniel and Councillor C Da Costa.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hunt declared a personal interest as her daughter was a teacher at a primary school in the borough.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMIOUSLY; That the Part I minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2020 were approved an accurate record.

SCHOOLS DURING COVID PERIOD

Clive Haines, Schools Leadership Development Manager, said that schools had remained open throughout lockdown, including school holidays. Schools were only closed if there was no demand. All children in care had been monitored during the period, with a daily recording register showing that 400-450 pupils had been in school, on average. Schools had been phoned to ensure that they were making contact with vulnerable pupils and any issues were raised immediately. There had also been virtual focus meetings with head teachers so that recovery plans and risk assessment could be created.

Clive Haines said that schools felt well supported by the council and that concerns were mostly based around opening up the school to more pupils. However, the willingness of schools to open up further had been encouraging, with 3,000-3,500 pupils now attending. There was also concern that the disadvantage gap would increase due to a lack of teaching over the period, along with the mental health of pupils.

The Chairman passed on his thanks to officers and teachers who had worked extremely hard during tough circumstances. He said that it was important for children to get back to school and catch up on the education that they had missed out on since March. He asked where the council was with planning for September and how best to support schools when they fully reopen.

Clive Haines said that they were still awaiting further guidance from the government on how to reopen safely and once this had been received they would support schools to ensure they were happy. Helen Daniels said that at her school they were using 'pods' of 15 pupils but hoped this would be extended to 30 by September. This could mean that children would not need to social distance within the bubble, which would make teaching and classroom activities much easier.

Councillor Del Campo asked about the 'middle children' that had been missing a lot of education and what could be done to help them. She also asked if there had been any cases of transmission in schools across the borough.

Clive Haines said that pupils that did not meet the children in care or vulnerable criteria were learning at home. There had been no confirmed cases from schools but there was one incident where symptoms had been reported and the school had been closed so that it could be cleaned, but the school opened like normal the next day.

Helen Daniels said that at Cookham Rise they had contacted families every week and had used a platform called 'See Saw' to set work for children to complete at home. They had also been promoting home learning projects which could be completed with their families.

Councillor Coppinger asked how much home learning had been taking place in secondary schools. Clive Haines explained that they had a learning platform that was similar to primary schools and that with the recent return of Year 10 and 12, there was a blended model of learning for these year groups.

Helen Huntley said that they had used Microsoft Teams to teach online lessons to pupils effectively. The school had also delivered home packages to children which included things like learning resources, as not all pupils had access to a tablet or laptop.

Councillor Knowles said that Eton College had opened up its online teaching to all UK schools to take advantage of. He said that while all teachers had been working extremely hard, he had concerns that some may become disillusioned with the profession. He wanted to ensure that wellbeing programmes were in place for staff and asked if there was a way to show appreciation for teachers.

Clive Haines said that there had been regular meetings and calls with staff to make sure that they were okay and resolve any issues that they had. RBWM councillors had sent out a 'thank you' to schools recently which had been well received.

Helen Huntley said that they had sent out a document to help with the wellbeing of both staff and pupils.

WORK BEING CARRIED OUT AROUND DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN AND PUPIL PREMIUM

Matthew Newberry, from Ofsted, had done some research about vulnerable/pupil premium children. He had asked various head teachers across the borough a series of questions which were mostly themed around the attendance patterns of vulnerable children. A 30 minute phone call was the method of recording information and Matthew Newberry commented on how impressive the commitment to the community was from head teachers. They had a passion for helping vulnerable groups and discovering new ways of teaching. There was also praise from schools for the school improvement service offered by RBWM, with Clive and his team doing an excellent job.

Looking at the findings, Matthew Newberry said that head teachers had noticed gaps, but it was not as simple as a gap between different groups of children. Engagement with learning during lockdown had been different and schools had to monitor its vision and values and encourage pupils to ensure that there was still structure to their school day. There had been a lot of feedback on anxiety, particularly on what would happen next year once schools opened up again to all students.

A higher number of vulnerable and pupil premium children had attended primary school than secondary school and the attendance nationally was very similar. Eight schools across the borough that were in areas of higher deprivation saw higher attendances of vulnerable

children. Strategies that had been suggested in order to stay in contact was communication with parents, newsletters and online meetings. The main challenge was that school attendance was not compulsory and these groups needed to be encouraged to attend school, if they needed to. IT provision had been made available for those who did not have access at home and funding for laptops had been made available. The dedication of staff had been excellent and they would be getting a full summer holiday as schools would close over summer.

Various home learning platforms had been used by schools and it would be good to explore which ones have proved to be the most useful. Some schools had also trialled having live online lessons which could be delivered to pupils from home, or by narrating over PowerPoints which would give the context and background of a specific topic. In terms of the next steps, Mathew Newberry said that blending learning strategies, broadening feedback and keeping up pastoral support were the key messages.

The Chairman said that vulnerable children were the priority of this Forum and he echoed the excellent communication from schools across the borough. He said that mental health was a long term issue and asked if there had been enough support from NHS England, along with RBWM could do anything more to support schools with the recovery curriculum.

Matthew Newberry said that the report provided a thorough and detailed analysis of issues which could be used if there was a second lockdown. He said that there was a significant amount of anxiety around the unknown but schools felt that they were well supported.

Helen Daniels said that they had received a lot of information and guidance this week from the government on what was going on. She said that people were feeling a lot more confident about the situation now.

Councillor Del Campo said that it was a comprehensive report. She asked how long school inspections were on hold for. Matthew Newberry said that the Chief Inspector wanted inspectors to work with local authorities while there were no inspections happening. Some Ofsted staff had been contacting safeguarding assessments, but there would be an interim period before full inspections were to resume.

Councillor Coppinger asked if there were any key lessons to take forward into the 'new world'. Matthew Newberry said that there was a number of references to academic research in the report which would form the bedrock of the return to school. There were some important things that could be learnt from this when schools reopened in September.

The Chairman said that the next steps were important, and thanked Matthew Newberry for his contributions. He highlighted that Clive Haines and his team should be thanked for all their hard work helping schools over a tough period.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman said that the October meeting was well positioned.

Councillor Del Campo said that some things might come up earlier and that she was happy to have an additional meeting if it was needed.

The Chairman said that he would be happy to do so if it was needed, it would be discussed with Kevin McDaniel and Clive Haines in due course.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes

place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....