

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

MONDAY, 7 JUNE 2021

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Maureen Hunt, Councillor Gurch Singh, Councillor Donna Stimson, Councillor Neil Knowles, Jo Heffer, Helen Daniels, Richard Daniels, Nicola Chandler, Kelly Nash, Carey Kelly and Claire Murray

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

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Tisi. Kevin McDaniel had informed the clerk that he would be joining the meeting late.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO PUPILS RETURNING

Clive Haines, Schools Leadership Development Manager, explained that the team had sent out a survey to schools across the borough before half term so that there would be a benchmark for pupils learning after lockdown. The survey received 29 responses out of 64 schools, secondary schools did not respond as they were doing their own teacher assessments. Looking at the results, 96% of schools said that there were gaps in pupils learning. Specifically looking at where the gaps were:

- Early years – all areas
- Phonics
- Writing
- Reading
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar
- Maths
- Social skills

Schools had also reported that Key Stage 1 pupils were showing a bigger gap than Key Stage 2. There were less gaps in KS1 reading than was originally predicted, this could be because parents were more confident at supporting reading at home. Phonics and writing proved to be more of a challenge to teach at home, with parents and carers unfamiliar with the approach and method to teach these 'specialised' subjects.

In order to address any gaps in learning, some schools had prioritised interventions which was small group teaching, specifically targeting pupil premium students. Some schools had employed a catch-up teacher who was running intervention groups in the afternoons, after school, on Saturdays and in the school holidays. Teachers and TA's were in dedicated year

group bubbles, identifying lost learning and putting in place specific intervention groups to deal with these areas.

One question in the survey asked how schools were spending the 'catch up' funding that had been allocated by the government. Some approaches included: interventions, booster class prior to school, targeted support, Year 1 small group work and guide groups.

It was important that schools were providing support for those pupils on an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan). Doorstop visits and phone calls from SENCO and class teachers had been provided to deliver personalised learning packages and offer support. The majority of EHCP pupils attended on site and there was proactive liaison with parents, with daily contact regarding work and progress. Personalised plans were created based on need and 1:1 teaching assistants were spending more time with children to work on EHCP objectives.

Generally, feedback from schools on pupils happiness was generally positive. Getting back into routines had helped with staff and parents happy with clear structures with not too many differences to the usual way of doing things. The use of IT was even better and some things that happened during lockdown would continue. There had been a focus on mental health and wellbeing which had supported everyone well. Pupils and parents had been keen to return with mental health needs, such as anxiety, amongst pupils post-lockdown had been identified and addressed with in-house support and intervention. Catch-Up provision had been very successful in plugging gaps and remote learning systems had ensured pupils continued to learn at home even when off for a day or two. The use of Google Meets and Zoom to engage with parents (parents' evenings, core subject workshops) had been positive and comprehensive risk assessments had kept the schools safe. Schools were also thankful to the local authority for the help and support that they had provided, with Clive Haines and Kevin McDaniel receiving praise from Headteachers for all their work supporting schools.

OPT IN ASSESSMENT FROM BOROUGH SCHOOLS

Jo Heffer, Link Advisor, said that there was no formal assessment provided by the Department for Education but assessment should still be used internally to inform teaching. A full programme of assessments was planned for the next academic year. This meant that there had been no formal assessments for two years, while some schools had not been moderated for six years. There was a need for schools to ensure that they were ready for assessment and moderation in 2022.

The service being offered was an opt in moderation service for end of KS1 and KS2 assessment, with the purpose of the moderation being to validate teachers judgements. Jo Heffer explained that there were a number of benefits:

- Less formal with schools being able to work in collaboration to say how they wanted it to work.
- It would support teachers who were new to Y2 or Y6.
- Helped schools to ensure that their assessment was consistent and in line with national and local standards.
- Provided feedback on schools' assessment procedures.
- It helped moderators remained skilled.

Training would be provided for Y2 and Y6 teachers, with online training sessions covering things like best practise for assessment and collection of evidence. Inter-school moderation sessions could also be offered. Currently, there were 14 schools who had opted in at KS1 and 10 schools at KS2.

Kevin McDaniel joined the meeting.

The Chairman asked Clive Haines if the local insights which had been discovered in the survey were consistent with the national trend.

Clive Haines said that he had not seen any national data, the local authority had decided to see where schools in the borough were at a local level.

The Chairman asked if mental health support was being provided to pupils returning to school.

Kelly Nash said that there had been a focus on wellbeing with a 'wellbeing return to school' programme being run, with the second phase due to be rolled out soon. The wellbeing support team were also on hand to ensure that targeted support could be provided.

Councillor Del Campo asked if the wellbeing support was specifically targeted at pupils with special needs or if it was available to all.

Kelly Nash explained that it was a universal offer and the team was supporting anybody that needed it. Targeted intervention could be used to offer individual support, specialist support could also be used if needed. There were mental health and wellbeing champions in certain schools too.

Councillor Del Campo asked if the learning gap Clive Haines had referred to was across the board and how much of an issue it was at KS1. She asked how many extra hours were being provided across evening, weekends and holidays.

Clive Haines said that the gaps in learning were across the board but had not been as large as originally predicted. The extra hours were being used during activities like Breakfast Club, Saturdays were only being used by one school. Most of the extra time being offered would be focussed on fun activities to help wellbeing.

Councillor Del Campo asked if there had been benefits to the less formal assessment.

Jo Heffer said that the moderation had not yet started but there was a requirement next year to go back to the statutory responsibilities which schools had to abide. Using the opt in moderation service, schools could identify groups they wanted advice and support for.

Councillor Del Campo asked if benefits in the less formal assessment were identified, if they could be collected and submitted to the government.

The Chairman said that he would continue to liaise with Clive Haines and Kevin McDaniel on a weekly basis as part of his Cabinet Member briefing and see where the insights went. If things could be fed into the national picture then they would do so.

Councillor Coppinger thanked all those working for Achieving for Children, Headteachers, teachers, TAs and everyone working in schools for all their hard work.

SCHOOL LEADERS UPDATE

Richard Daniels gave an update from Riverside Primary School. He said that there had been two main areas identified where there were significant gaps, academically and emotionally. Early reading and phonics of Years 1, 2 and 3 had been affected and they were behind on where they should be. The school had employed a new TA which had allowed other TAs to help with things like phonics catch up. Gaps had also been identified in Maths. The Department for Education had published a guide on things that children needed to know as they moved up the year groups. The vocabulary of children had suffered and Riverside was therefore adding an extra half hour of reading a day along with extra writing lessons each week. The emotional side of development was also important, with three extra learning mentors being employed at the school. They ran nurture groups to help children with their wellbeing and emotions. Sessions were also being run to help overcome separation anxiety. A

friends for life programme was being run by a recently retired teacher while daily mindfulness sessions were also being provided which had a positive impact on focus. Richard Daniels said that there were plans for a summer term of fun activities and events, with each week being a different experience. So far, the experiences had been really positive and the school had received good feedback from parents. Teachers had found that the experiences had given children something to write about which helped improve their skills and learning in the classroom.

Nicola Chandler gave an update to the Forum on Dedworth Middle School. Attendance had not been significantly affected, there was an average of around 96% pre-Covid and this figure had remained relatively stable. Regarding safeguarding, the school had seen an increase in referrals. Teachers had investigated gaps in learning, with the English curriculum being restructured as a result. Spelling, punctuation and grammar was a particularly important focus. Pupil premium children were more affected by being out of school, with smaller class sizes being introduced in Maths and English to stretch the more able and allow catch up tutors to help those that were struggling. After school sessions had been provided from Monday to Thursday with one being specifically provided for pupil premium children. New online tools had been introduced for Maths and an extra parents evening had been added into the schedule to keep parents up to date with progress. Daily mindful sessions were being provided and once a week there was an extended tutor time to focus on wellbeing. There were plans to hold a summer school which would be offered to Year 4 and Year 6. Nicola Chandler thanked Clive Haines and everyone at RBWM for all their support.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS COORDINATOR UPDATE

Carey Kelly, from South Ascot Village School, gave an update. She said that children were able to swim twice a week and additional PE lessons had been provided to help with wellbeing. In September 2022, a new SEN unit would be opened at the school for children who struggled in a mainstream school, this would allow them to be integrated into mainstream subjects at foundation level. The school currently had 5 children with an EHCP. During lockdown, the school was in constant contact with parents with Microsoft Teams being utilised for lessons during the most recent lockdown. All but one child was able to use Teams, but staff had discovered that it was difficult for the children to get the most out of learning virtually. Therefore, work was delivered to homes and this helped to build confidence with parents as a result. The anxiety amongst parents had been high, with a different environment to normal for the children.

Carey Kelly had set up a risk assessment with each individual child. The teachers needed to be comfortable with the progress that had been made by children over lockdown and embraced where the children were in their learning. Recently, the school has made good use of its grounds and encouraged the children to play games and activities. A baseline assessment was completed in March, which showed that younger year groups had been most affected by being out of school. Some parents were low skilled themselves so were unable to help their children with home learning. Mental health was an important focus, with surveys being conducted to ensure that it was prioritised and adequate. There was one EHCP child who had not been in school pre lockdown but the school had experimented with a robot in the classroom that was able to link with the child and let them feel like they were in the same room as their teachers and friends. Looking towards the future, Carey Kelly felt that the school and children were in a good place and that more would be done with parents going forward.

The Chairman said it was reassuring to hear the huge effort that was going in to make sure that children were receiving support and that their mental health was being looked after. He thanked Carey Kelly for her passion and enthusiasm.

Councillor Del Campo commented that the increase in safeguarding referrals was a concern and asked if MASH was able to cope with the increased workload.

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of Children’s Services, said that three additional staff members had been brought in to keep up with the level of demand. There had been a positive response to additional staff being brought in last year to the family resilience service.

The Chairman said that if additional resources were needed for safeguarding then they would be found.

Councillor Del Campo asked if there was anything that Members or officers could do more of to help teachers.

The Chairman said that if anyone had any suggestions then they were welcome to contact him. He thanked Clive Haines for all his work.

Kevin McDaniel said that solutions were different for all schools.

NEXT STEPS TO SUPPORT PUPIL PREMIUM CHILDREN

Helen Daniels said that the pupil premium network had not met since the pandemic started but plans were being made to get the network back up and running in late September. There was a new pupil premium strategy statement which had been published by the Department for Education. The focus was helping Headteachers and pupil premium representatives in school to complete the statement. It was important that schools were using an evidence-based approach to how they spent their money.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Councillor Stimson said that she had been doing some work with schools on climate change and sustainability and asked if it would be possible to discuss the work at the next meeting of the Forum.

The Chairman said it was a really important area of work, particularly as young people were interested in the climate and sustainability. He said it would be good to have it on the agenda at the next meeting.

Members of the Forum noted that the date of the next meeting would be Thursday 14th October 2021, starting at 5pm.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....