

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

Monday 6 February 2023

Present virtually: Councillors David Coppinger (Vice-Chair, in the Chair) and Catherine Del Campo

Officers in attendance virtually: Mark Beeley, Clive Haines, Kelly Nash, Claire Murray, Helen Daniels and Alasdair Whitelaw

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Carroll.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th October 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Pupil Premium and Quality Teach First programme

Claire Murray, School Improvement Manager, said that the disadvantage gap was the widest it had been in ten years nationally. At key stage 2, 43% of poorer pupils reached the expected standard. Considering reading, writing and maths, the percentage that achieved the expected standard had fallen more significantly amongst poorer pupils. RBWM was slightly below the national trend. The council was looking to address the gap by continuing with pupil premium networks, supporting the three year pupil premium strategy and schools were expected to choose from a number of approaches on how to spend pupil premium funding. RBWM had undertaken a borough project, this would allow schools to focus on high quality teacher training using instructional coaching. The project would run from June 2023 to June 2024 and would be run in collaboration with Tom Sherrington. Instructional coaching had the aim of having a positive impact on student outcomes, increasing teacher effectiveness and above all reducing the achievement gap. So far, over 30 schools in the borough had signed up to the programme, with link advisors targeting schools who had not yet signed up to see if the programme would be appropriate for them.

Councillor Coppinger asked if the situation was similar in the two other local authorities which were run by Achieving for Children.

Clive Haines, Deputy Director for Education, said that all authorities had a similar drop, this was the first year of post pandemic results. The disadvantage gap had always been an issue in RBWM, it was anticipated that there would be a change in the data after a couple of years of the programme being implemented.

Claire Murray added that RBWM was taking a whole borough approach to the issue, this would not have an instant impact which was why the government recognised that it was a three year strategy.

Helen Daniels, Headteacher at Cookham Rise Primary School and RBWM Link Advisor, confirmed that the pattern was the same across the country.

Councillor Del Campo noted that the disadvantage gap was the same as it was in 2011 but it seemed that this was mostly attributable to the pandemic. The drop in phonics achievement was clear, this showed the importance of early years education for disadvantaged pupils. Councillor Del Campo asked if there was anything that officers would do differently for disadvantaged children if another pandemic occurred.

Clive Haines said that phonics was one of the hardest things to teach online as it needed to be repetitive. Early years was an area of concentration for the council, they were looking to introduce an early years readiness programme.

Helen Daniels said that schools had structured phonics lessons, during the first lockdown this could not be transferred online effectively as it was an area that could not be taught at home easily by parents.

Initial Teaching Training Update

Claire Murray explained that all teacher training providers had to go through a rigorous accreditation programme. This was to ensure that high quality training was compared to a new set of quality requirements. RBWM passed the process, this was a significant achievement as a third of training providers did not pass. Over the past year, 30 trainees had gained their PGCE and all had gained employment after their training. A whole new curriculum would be coming in from September 2024. To help the council with the new requirements, there was a grant available of up to £25,000, for which a bid had been placed. The Department for Education had appointed RBWM with a quality associate to advise on the process, with a request for materials to be submitted by March for the first review. RBWM was in talks with other local providers who had not been accredited to see if the training programme could be expanded further.

Councillor Del Campo asked if teachers were being trained in the borough but that it was at a fairly early stage.

Clive Haines explained that the programme had been running for a number of years, the programme had received a good Ofsted rating which was why the council had decided to bid for the grant funding.

Claire Murray said that the initial teacher training programme had been running since 2004, all teachers received a PGCE as part of the programme. The retention rate, which was based on how many trainees were still in the teaching profession five years later, was at around 85%. The national figure was 1 in 5 teachers would leave after the first year.

Councillor Del Campo asked how many teachers stayed in the borough. She was informed that the figure was 85%.

Attendance changes for September 2023

Alasdair Whitelaw, Pupil Inclusion and Support Manager, said that all children were entitled to an education and this was the responsibility of the parent or carer to ensure that their children attended school. New guidance had been published on attendance in May 2022, which applied from September 2022 and would become statutory from September 2023. The proposed changes were the most significant in attendance since 1870. Some of the changes included:

- Schools and local authorities would have clearly defined statutory roles for the first time, which would be set out in a clear table.
- Schools would have legal responsibilities to proactively improve attendance for the first time.

- All parents and carers would receive clear expectations from the school on attendance, have access to early intervention and support first before any legal action.
- Attendance teams would work in partnership with early to help to provide a whole family response with a single assessment, plan and lead practitioner.
- Data would be collected from independent schools for the first time and they would receive the same support from local authorities.

By September 2023, there would be a named contact for all schools in RBWM which was a total of 88 schools. An attendance support meeting would be arranged each term to discuss and agree targeted actions for pupils who were consistently absent, as well as providing an opportunity to analyse school data and strategies.

Councillor Del Campo noted that initially, the number of fixed penalty notices and legal action cases could rise but over time this could decrease as more support was provided by the council.

Alasdair Whitelaw said that a number of schools did not have the support of an education welfare officer and that they could use fixed penalty notices at an early stage. Fines could only be issued by the local authority, so the team would check that all previous stages of support had been explored before a fine was confirmed.

Councillor Del Campo asked if independent schools were treated in the same way as state schools.

Alasdair Whitelaw explained that they would be, they needed to have an allocated leadership member for attendance, they would be invited to the network meetings and they were unable to hand out fixed penalty notices.

Councillor Coppinger asked how many independent schools there were in RBWM. It was confirmed that there were 22 independent schools in the borough, this was a higher proportion than other local authorities.

Clive Haines added that it was the first time that a statutory duty had been extended to the independent sector which the local authority was responsible for.

SEND Strategy Implementation Update

Kelly Nash, Education Support and SEND Strategy Manager, explained that there was a five year SEND strategy which covered 2023-2027. Forest Bridge school would be helping to develop a young person friendly version of the strategy, with the aim of this being produced by the summer. An inclusion summit would be held later in the week where the strategy would be officially launched. Each section of the strategy would be considered at the summit which would highlight the work that would be delivered. Kelly Nash said that the governance of the SEND strategy would be overseen by the steering board.

Councillor Del Campo asked if it was possible for the output from the inclusion summit to be shared with those who would be unable to attend.

Kelly Nash said that parts of the summit would be recorded and there would be a highlights reel. Presentations would also be shared after the summit.

Delivering Better Values Update

Clive Haines highlighted that RBWM had been invited to be part of the Delivering Better Values programme which had been announced by the Department for Education in 2022. The programme was designed to provide dedicated support and funding to help local authorities with substantial deficit issues in their high needs block. The aim of the programme was to

reform the high needs system so that more local authorities would be on a more sustainable footing. Currently £85 million had been dedicated to the programme. RBWM was currently on WAVE2 of the programme, with data collection starting in December 2022. Regular meetings with the provider showed that RBWM was on track with progress.

Councillor Del Campo said that there were a number of schools that were currently rated as outstanding but were due an Ofsted inspection. It would be good to receive an update on any changes as a result of Ofsted inspections at a future meeting.

Clive Haines provided a brief update, RBWM was at 97% of all schools being rated as either good or outstanding. One school had recently been downgraded from outstanding to good, however this was due to a number of factors like a leadership change and was seen as a positive result.

Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Forum would take place on Thursday 22nd June 2023 at 5pm.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.00 pm

Chair.....

Date.....