

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 21 January 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 21 January 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Cutler (Chair), Woolf (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Graham, Jeapes, Ngongo and Williamson

Co-opted Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative
Member: (Primary)

Also Present: Councillor Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair

144 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Zaleera Wallace and Mary Clement.

145 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

146 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

147 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)

Cllr Graham asked for it to be recorded that he submitted apologies to the 26th November meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th November 2019 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them, subject to the above amendment.

148 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that draft recommendations for the review of Equalities in Educational Outcomes were being developed and would be submitted to the next meeting.

149 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A6)**

None.

150 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)**

None.

151 **EQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES - WITNESS EVIDENCE AND CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (ITEM NO. B1)**

a) Data Update

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary), introduced the data update.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The number of Black Caribbean pupils had decreased since 2013, whereas the number of White UK FSM pupils varied from year to year.
- Data indicated that, on average, pupils from Black Caribbean and White UK FSM groups did not make the same level of progress as their peers.
- Levels of attainment for English and Maths were below average for pupils from Black Caribbean and White UK FSM groups.
- A member asked if one or two schools had particular issues with attainment and progress that would impact on the overall figures. In response, it was commented that Islington's schools did have differing levels of attainment, however pupils at lower-attaining schools tended to attain lower grades overall. Attainment issues at those schools were not limited to specific groups.
- Underachievement in Maths was an issue that disproportionately affected White UK FSM and Black Caribbean pupils. The Committee emphasised the need for employment and training pathways for lower attaining pupils. Many apprenticeships required a grade 4 or higher in GCSE Maths and English; it was important that those who did not achieve these grades had routes into quality employment.
- The Committee noted the difficulty of recruiting and retaining highly skilled maths teachers. Mathematics graduates tended to be attracted to other professions.

b) Evidence from Dr Antonina Tereshchenko, UCL Institute of Education

Dr Tereshchenko presented to the Committee on the impact of setting and attainment grouping in schools.

- Dr Tereshchenko considered that attainment grouping in schools entrenched social inequalities.

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- Dr Tereshchenko summarised the different methods of ability grouping used across primary and secondary schools. These resulted in differing levels of segregation between higher and lower attaining pupils.
- Not all schools used setting for all subjects, however all secondary schools in England used setting for mathematics. Half of all primary schools had introduced setting for Year 5 and 6 pupils.
- The socio-economic background of pupils was closely linked to levels of attainment and BAME pupils were over-represented in lower sets.
- Research had found that pupils were misallocated to sets, with working-class and BAME pupils more likely to be allocated to lower sets, and White students more likely to be allocated to top sets, regardless of their academic ability.
- Lower sets were more likely to be placed with less qualified teachers. This could result in a lower quality education.
- Schools had lower expectations for pupils in lower sets. Pupils were not challenged to attain higher grades and may be entered for foundation tier exams where it is not possible to attain the highest grades.
- Pupils in the lowest sets reported lower levels of self-confidence than their peers in higher sets. It was suggested that placement in a lower set could be a self-fulfilling prophecy, rather than an accurate reflection of academic ability.
- The setting practices of schools often lacked flexibility; pupils were not able to move between sets.
- It was explained that classroom sizes were limited and therefore when pupils of a similar ability were not able to be contained within a single class, or when pupil attainment was borderline between a higher and lower set, schools had to make a decision on which pupils should be in each set. Dr Tereshchenko's research found that this process could lead to the misallocation of pupils to sets.
- Dr Tereshchenko's study had evaluated the setting of pupils in KS3 against their Year 6 SATs scores. This found that Black students were 2.5 times more likely to be misallocated to a lower set, and girls were more likely than boys to be misallocated to a lower set in mathematics.
- UCL researchers had asked pupils about their experiences of setting and their views on their teachers. Young people perceived differences between the teaching styles of different sets, commenting that higher sets had higher behavioural standards and there was respect between pupils and teachers, whereas lower sets were taught at a slower pace, rules were relaxed, and there was an element of "spoon feeding" pupils information.
- Researchers had evaluated the reported self-confidence of pupils at the start of Year 7 and how this developed over time. It was found that pupils in higher sets increased in self-confidence by the end of Year 8, whereas the self-confidence of pupils in lower sets decreased. Pupils in lower sets were more likely to be nervous, anxious and disengaged from education.
- Some pupils had expressed frustration with the lack of flexibility in setting. Some had been promised that they could move up a set if they

achieved high levels of attainment, however in reality this did not happen often.

- There was evidence that the attainment of pupils decreases after they are placed in a lower set.
- The demographic differences between sets, and the inflexibility of setting practices, contributed to social segregation within schools.
- UCL did not advocate ending setting and moving to mixed-attainment grouping as there was a lack of evidence on the impact of this. However, it was important for teachers to be aware of the impact of setting, and work to minimise or mitigate this. Flexibility in setting practices partially helped to address these concerns.
- It was noted that young people at the Upward Bound project had expressed frustration with setting, commenting that it depressed aspiration and separated off already-underachieving students leaving them to fall even further behind. Some young people in lower sets had expressed that they felt "written off".
- The Committee asked why setting had become so entrenched in schools. In response, it was advised that schools saw this as a beneficial way to teach pupils and order their timetable.
- It was suggested that some teachers were resistant to ending or minimising setting, commenting that it would result in additional work at a time when they are already significantly overworked. There was also a concern at the reaction of parents, who were thought to strongly support setting.
- It was suggested that newly qualified teachers should not be placed with lower sets, as the students would benefit most from a more experienced teacher.
- The Committee noted the link between lower sets and behaviour issues. Through national research teachers had reported instances of fights in lower sets.
- A member suggested that pupils could be set anonymously to mitigate against unconscious bias.
- A member suggested that cuts to school funding and the introduction of the new national curriculum had contributed to inequalities. In the 2000s schools had additional resources to put into lower sets, however since 2010 there had been a stronger focus on setting and zero tolerance behaviour policies.
- Officers commented that many parents were supportive of setting as it was seen as a common sense approach.
- Officers advised that primary schools in Islington set pupils for English, however it was noted that the most experienced teachers tended to be placed with the least able sets. Islington Council encouraged schools to invest in professional development to increase the skills of teaching staff. Pupils were also expected to move up a phonics set every six weeks. The progress of young people was constantly monitored.
- Officers emphasised that young people with behavioural issues may have experienced trauma. Islington's trauma-informed approaches sought to equip teachers with the skills to support young people with behavioural issues.

The Committee thanked Dr Tereshchenko for her attendance.

c) Further evidence relevant to the review

The Chair advised that members had visited a number of education settings and the information received during the visits would feed in to the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee considered the Best Practice Charter for Engaging Parents/Carers, Children and Communities, developed with the Equalities Reference Group. The Charter came with a self-evaluation toolkit which allowed schools to evaluate their progress. This was suitable for both primary and secondary schools and early years settings.

The Committee commented on the difficulty of engaging parents who may work multiple jobs and not be available to attend school meetings. In response, it was advised that schools should recognise the needs of all parents and carers and find a way to communicate with them effectively. Officers commented that it was important for schools to hold events for parents and families that were relevant to their interests.

d) Concluding Discussion

Committee members were asked to send their suggestions for possible conclusions and recommendations to the Chair and Vice-Chair for consideration.

152 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q2 2019/20) (ITEM NO. B2)**

Laura Eden, Director of Youth and Communities, introduced the quarterly performance report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee queried why some indicators that had minimal change were rated "yellow" whereas others showing a slight improvement were rated "green". Officers advised that this would be reviewed for the next report.
- The Committee noted that the number of young people missing from care had increased. Officers advised that this was being monitored closely.
- The Committee expressed concern that re-referrals to Children's Social Care had slightly increased. Officers noted that this was particularly problematic when there was only a short time between re-referrals, as it indicated that previous interventions had not been effective.

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- The Committee welcomed that some progress had been made to improve the placement stability of young people in care.
- The Committee requested that teenage pregnancy figures be included in future quarterly reports.
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RESOLVED:

That performance in Quarter 2 of 2019/20 be noted.

153 WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B3)

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.05 pm

Chair