

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Thursday, 22 November 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Thursday, 22 November 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Cutler (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Ismail, Ngongo and Woolf

Co-opted Member: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Woodbyrne.

It was also noted that Councillor Caluori, the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, had submitted apologies for absence.

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

47 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2018 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

49 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that Committee members had visited the New River College Pupil Referral Unit to meet with staff and pupils and to hear their views on exclusion and related matters. The Chair thanked the staff and students for being open and honest, commenting that it was a productive visit.

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

None.

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

None.

52 **PERMANENT AND FIXED PERIOD EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

The Committee received evidence from three head teachers on their approaches to permanent and fixed period exclusion from school.

a) Patrick Mildren, Head Teacher, Canonbury Primary School

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Canonbury Primary School was a two-form entry school with 471 pupils, including the Nursery School. The school had a low rate of permanent exclusion. Fixed term exclusions were issued on occasion.
- Exclusion was used as a last resort in instances when the safety of the school was compromised. Fixed term exclusions could be given for one, two, or three days, and all pupils underwent a period of reintegration on their return to school. Mr Mildren commented that it was important to work with both pupils and their parents on pupil behaviour issues.
- It was noted that a many pupils have emotional and social needs and schools need to be mindful of this when addressing behaviour issues.
- It was commented that excluded pupils tended to have high levels of need. Pupils with emotional needs may resort to physical violence or verbal abuse if they are in a heightened state.
- Canonbury School made use of the outreach service offered by New River College and thought that this was very effective in helping to prevent exclusions. The outreach support service assisted the school in developing support and interventions for pupils at risk of exclusion; it was commented that this benefitted both pupils and teachers.
- Some pupils at risk of exclusion had temporary placements at New River College, attending for two days a week. These pupils typically had a long history of challenging behavioural issues. These pupils were in Years 5 and 6; it was commented that behavioural needs tended to escalate for pupils aged 10 to 11.
- Mr Mildren believed that primary school children with high levels of need could be better supported by having access to different learning environments in school. It could be challenging to keep some pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs in the classroom, however it was thought that these pupils would benefit from a "nurture hub" within the school where they could learn in a different environment with more intensive support from school staff. This could provide opportunities not available in the classroom, for example, pupils could learn through play, or make use of other techniques not able to be implemented for a whole class. It was acknowledged that schools had limited resources to provide such a space, however it was thought that

providing a variety of learning environments within school would help to keep pupils with high levels of need in mainstream education.

- Mr Mildren emphasised the importance of early intervention and providing the right support to pupils at the right time. It was thought that providing support to pupils with additional social, emotional and behavioural needs from a younger age would help to minimise the development of severe behavioural issues and would support young people in preparing for secondary school. Canonbury Primary School was aware that some former pupils were displaying challenging behaviour in secondary school; this prompted teaching staff to consider what else they could have done to support those young people.
- A member asked how Canonbury School ensured that the extreme behaviours of some pupils did not impact on others, particularly given that the school only used fixed term exclusion as a last resort. In response, it was advised that the school had adopted a behaviour policy which was intended to make children feel safe. The school sought to influence the behaviour of its pupils by reinforcing positive messages throughout the school. Mr Mildren also noted the importance of teaching assistants in the classroom. It was important for teaching assistants to have strong empathy skills to enable them to relate to pupils with additional needs. Focusing teaching assistant support on pupils with additional needs helped to ensure that the remainder of the class could learn without disruption.
- A member noted that some parents and young people reported negative experiences of pupil referral units and asked if pupil referral units were fit for purpose. In response, Mr Mildren commented that he could not speak for pupil referral units, but he recognised that some young people had needs that could not be met inside mainstream school. Although schools sought to teach through a variety of learning styles, some pupils did not cope in mainstream school and pupil referral units could be beneficial for these pupils. Canonbury School sought to provide successful interventions for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs, but there was a limit to what primary schools could achieve within their existing resources.
- Mr Mildren commented that primary schools were well placed to implement early intervention approaches, but were not always able to provide support to young people with extreme needs.
- A member noted that parents may need help in supporting children with challenging behaviours and asked if Canonbury School signposted the parents of pupils at risk of exclusion to early help services. In response it was advised that the school did signpost parents to services from time to time, but it was important for the school to build a positive relationship with parents to allow such conversations to take place. Mr Mildren commented that this was sometimes difficult. Some parents did not agree that their child had additional needs; for example, it was commented that some parents refused for their children to receive CAMHS support. It was important for schools to build a positive relationship with parents to allow honest discussions to take place, and

to work together with parents to address a young person's behaviour both inside and outside of school.

- A member asked if mental health provision for primary school children was adequate. In response, Mr Mildren commented that he would welcome an increased level of mental health support to primary schools. Canonbury Primary School paid extra money to the CAMHS service which effectively doubled the resource available to the school. Mr Mildren thought that CAMHS support was very valuable and benefitted both young people and teaching staff, however noted that if all schools made use of the service to the same extent, then the CAMHS service would not be sustainable. Canonbury School prioritised support for those with the greatest needs; the school also made use of CAMHS to support teachers in helping them to develop strategies for supporting pupils with mental health needs.
- Primary age pupils with mental health needs tended to have attachment issues. These pupils sometimes came to school unsettled, anxious and not ready to learn.
- A member asked why there was a disparity between the exclusion rates of different schools. In response, it was advised that each school had a different ethos and priorities. Canonbury Primary School focused on supporting pupils with challenging behaviours and worked flexibly to keep young people with additional needs in mainstream school. However, there was a limit to the support that could be provided, and each school worked in a slightly different context.
- Issuing multiple fixed term exclusions was not an effective method to manage behaviour. It was commented that excluded pupils feel a sense of rejection and exclusion does not address the root cause of a pupils' poor behaviour. It was commented that schools needed to have clear sanctions for poor behaviour, but should make use of a range of interventions, with a focus on addressing and improving behaviour. Canonbury School's behaviour policy included issuing 'red cards' to pupils, which resulted in holding a meeting with the child's parents and facilitating a restorative conversation. If pupils received three red cards in short succession then the school escalated interventions, holding more in depth conversations with parents on their child's behaviour. The school had a clear behaviour pathway which was communicated to parents and pupils.
- Following a question from a member of the public, it was commented that Canonbury School valued the support services available to young people with additional behavioural and learning needs, which included educational psychology, CAMHS, and outreach services from New River College and The Bridge special school. Mr Mildren noted that there were very strong partnerships in Islington which allowed schools to make use of external expertise; this was particularly effective in helping schools to develop their own provision.
- Mr Mildren advised that the school had excellent communication with New River College on the progress of pupils that were attending the pupil referral unit on a temporary placement. Representatives of the school visited New River College on a regular basis and commented that

their commitment to re-engaging pupils in mainstream education was impressive.

- A member of the Committee commented that it would be interesting to compare the CAMHS resource levels of high excluding and low excluding schools, suggesting that high excluding schools may not be making best use of the support services available.
- In conclusion, Mr Mildren thought that empowering teachers and head teachers to solve behaviour issues within their school would help to reduce the borough's exclusion rate. It was thought that developing different learning environments within schools, such as "nurture hubs", would help schools to manage challenging behaviours and would offer better support to young people at risk of exclusion.

b) Jamie Brownill, Head Teacher, Central Foundation Secondary School

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Central Foundation School is an all-boys secondary school with over 1,000 pupils. It was a relatively low-excluding school compared to others in the borough.
- In the previous year two pupils had been permanently excluded. No pupils had been referred to alternative provision.
- Central Foundation School emphasised the importance of pupils spending time in class; if pupils had high levels of attendance and were not excluded, there was no reason why they should not be successful. For that reason, Mr Brownhill had focused the school's systems and approaches on supporting pupils to stay in school.
- Behaviour was managed at Head Teacher level to ensure that the senior leadership team had direct oversight of behaviour in the classroom. The senior leadership team discussed pupil behaviour daily.
- On average, the school issued around 30 fixed term exclusion a year. This was a significant reduction in comparison to eight years ago, when the school issued 300 fixed term exclusions.
- The school had developed an 'inclusion centre' which allowed pupils to effectively serve a fixed period exclusion inside of school. In addressing pupil behaviour, the school also made use of therapeutic interventions, restorative justice approaches, and held meetings with parents.
- The school evaluated behaviour incidents to analyse where and when incidents took place. If a pattern was identified, the school would consider changing its processes or practices to prevent further incidents. For example, the school had recently moved from a whole-school lunch break to a split lunch break and this had almost eradicated lunchtime behaviour incidents. Mr Brownhill noted that schools constantly needed to adapt to meet the challenges they faced.
- Central Foundation School made use of 'attachment theory'; all young people should feel attached to the school, and teachers

needed to foster this sense of attachment by understanding that young people need to feel safe, secure and loved.

- Central Foundation School emphasised the importance of forgiveness. In staff interviews, teachers needed to demonstrate empathy and a willingness to forgive young people.
- The school did not exclude pupils for their first instance of disruptive behaviour.
- Central Foundation School delivered a standard academic curriculum, it did not offer vocational subjects as alternative classes for pupils that found academic subjects challenging. Instead, the school adapted how the curriculum was delivered, tailoring it to the needs of pupils.
- Central Foundation School only employed one teaching assistant as it chose to focus its resources on teachers. This resulted in pupils being taught in smaller classes which allowed more targeted support to be given.
- Central Foundation School made use of whole-school assemblies to communicate key messages to pupils.
- Mr Brownhill spoke of the importance of protecting pupils' learning in the classroom. All teachers had access to a button on their interactive whiteboard which could call another member of staff to the classroom to assist with behaviour incidents. Disruptive pupils could then be removed from the classroom and would spend the remainder of the lesson in the 'withdrawal room'. It was commented that many teachers never made use of this facility, however the technology empowered teachers and allowed them to deal with behaviour incidents without further disrupting their lesson.
- Mr Brownhill noted that the behaviour of pupils had become increasingly challenging in recent years; the number of violent incidents had increased and there was an increased pressure from parents to exclude pupils for violent incidents. It was also noted that teaching unions had concerns about pupils remaining in mainstream school after violent incidents; these concerns focused on the health and safety of school staff and pupils.
- It was commented that the sustained focus on school attainment and real term decreases in school funding were additional pressures on schools which may be a contributing factor to decisions to exclude in some schools. This was not the approach taken by Central Foundation School. Mr Brownhill emphasised the importance of schools having a clear moral purpose and a strong governing body and leadership team.
- A member commented that some excluded pupils felt let down by the education system and queried if this was justified. In response, it was commented that all schools worked in a challenging environment. Central Foundation School carried out case reviews after serious incidents to consolidate learning and assess if any of their processes should be amended. Although Central Foundation School had a strong governing body and relatively stable staffing arrangements, it was known that some schools had issues with

- recruitment, funding and leadership, and these issues could have a detrimental effect on pupil wellbeing if not addressed successfully.
- A member queried if the lack of specific funding to support ethnic minority pupils was having an impact on young people and teachers. In response, it was advised that Islington's schools had been affected by budget cuts in recent years and any cut to school budgets would undoubtedly have an impact on children from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, Central Foundation School had a particular issue with the attainment of White British pupils, which was comparatively lower than their peers.
 - A member asked if Mr Brownhill considered there to be adequate support services available for young people at risk of exclusion. In response, it was advised that he was aware of approximately ten young people in Central Foundation School with very challenging behaviour who were at risk of exclusion. The school was working with these young people to keep them in mainstream education and there were a range of services and interventions available, however it was considered that earlier intervention may have prevented their needs from escalating. Mr Brownhill commented that early intervention approaches were the most effective method of support; however, it was sometimes challenging to identify the young people in need of support at an early stage.
 - A member commented on the importance of kindness and forgiveness and how the ethos of a school and the vision of the head teacher would be a significant factor in whether a school decided to exclude pupils.

c) Nigel Smith, Head Teacher, New River College Pupil Referral Unit

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- New River College was a consortium of three pupil referral units. The Primary PRU was for children aged 5 to 11, often with severe emotional needs. The Secondary PRU was for children in Key Stage 3 or 4 and was split over two sites. The Ethorne Road site was primarily for pupils in Key Stage 3 with complex social and emotional needs who were unable to attend mainstream school; the Lough Road site was primarily for pupils in Key Stage 4 who had been excluded and had very challenging behavioural issues. New River College also operated a Medical PRU for children who were too ill to attend mainstream school; these children may have complex mental health needs or long term medical conditions. All pupils had experienced trauma to some extent.
- Some parents and young people had a negative perception of pupil referral units. Mr Smith considered that this was often inaccurate, and although pupil referral units were challenging settings, the reality was that New River College was a nurturing and supportive school.

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- Mr Smith said that no child at New River College was beyond help. Although the young people had complex needs and their behaviour could be challenging, they were a pleasure to work with.
- New River College took a personalised approach to working with children and young people, recognising their individual needs and challenges. This was informed by the information received from mainstream schools. Mr Smith commented that the information received from Islington Schools was generally very good, however information was sometimes lacking for pupils who resided in Islington but had attended schools outside of the borough.
- New River College had a strong induction process for new pupils which assessed their academic ability and social and emotional needs.
- New River College had developed a personal development tool which measured pupil progress against a range of indicators.
- Mr Smith commented on the importance of working positively with parents on their child's behaviour and attainment. It was commented that some parents also had complex needs and therefore it could be challenging to engage with them.
- New River College had established cookery clubs and gardening clubs that parents were encouraged to support.
- New River College had established a debating society for young people, which was considered to be a good avenue for young people to channel their emotions.
- Teaching and learning was crucial to New River College and Ofsted made no allowances for pupil referral units working with a challenging cohort of young people. New River College had a strong curriculum delivered by good quality teachers and this had achieved good academic results in recent years. The curriculum was skills-based with a particular focus on English and Maths. In the previous year the majority of pupils achieved a Grade 4 for GCSE English.
- In the previous year no New River College pupils had become NEET and for the past three years fewer than ten pupils had become NEET. New River College held a careers week every March and former pupils were invited to present on their journey since they had left New River College.
- New River College worked to challenge the negative perception of pupil referral units in the local community. It was commented that this perception impacts on young people and can be detrimental to their wellbeing.
- New River College worked closely with mainstream schools; its outreach service engaged with every school in the borough. Mr Smith also provided advice to schools on how to support young people at risk of exclusion; it was commented that approximately three head teachers a week contacted New River College for advice.
- Mr Smith considered that there was never a need to exclude a young person for persistent disruptive behaviour. If disruptive pupils had to leave their mainstream school, then it was more appropriate

for them to have a fresh start at another mainstream school under the Fair Access Protocol.

- New River College worked with their pupils to identify a pathway so they had clear aims and ambitions for the future. Some young people wanted to pursue vocational pathways and the school engaged with local employers to support this. For example, one young person wanted to develop catering skills and had started a job with Pret A Manger; another had started working as a painter / decorator.
- Some young people came from families with multiple complex needs, however did not meet the threshold for statutory intervention. Sometimes these families had been offered support from Early Help services, but had rejected this offer.
- New River College had one Special Educational Needs Coordinator who worked across all three PRUs.
- New River College received CAMHS support three days a week; the CAMHS worker was fully integrated into the college.
- Mr Smith commented that it would be helpful for a social worker to be based at the school. This would enhance the offer of support available to young people.
- Mr Smith commented that the schools that used the outreach service the most had very low levels of exclusion. However, it was also commented that the outreach service was already stretched and did not have the capacity to significantly increase its offer to schools.
- New River College was proud to be part of Islington's Community of Schools and was pleased to offer support to other schools.
- A member commented on the committee's visit to New River College, noting that some pupils felt a sense of rejection and loss following exclusion. They had lost friendships with their peers and some understood that their opportunities had been curtailed by their exclusion and by the limits of New River College's curriculum. Some young people regretted their previous behaviour.
- A member queried if 'zero tolerance' approaches to behaviour management, and a lack of understanding about child development, had contributed to the increase in the number of exclusions over recent years, and if New River College's practices were informed by a knowledge of child development. In response, it was commented that exclusion was a traumatic experience for young people who usually already had traumatic lives. New River College understood that the experience of exclusion stays with young people for their whole life; Mr Smith commented that he was excluded from school and could relate to young people's experiences. Young people who had been excluded felt a sense of rejection and were sometimes angry at their family, their school, and their community. All schools operated differently and Mr Smith did not want to criticise the decisions and approaches of mainstream schools, however it was accepted that financial and academic pressures encouraged schools to adopt behaviour policies and make decisions that may not

prioritise the wellbeing of children with challenging behaviour, and would not be appropriate if schools were operating in a different context.

- In response to a question, it was commented that some schools used the outreach service in a transformative way to develop the skills of teaching and non-teaching staff. This had been a positive experience for schools and had assisted them in adopting ways of working that seek to prevent exclusion and support pupils with complex needs and challenging behaviours. However, other schools engaged with the service to work with a particular child immediately before they were excluded. This was not considered to be a successful method of preventing exclusion.
- One school had used the outreach service to carry out a behaviour audit. This involved observing lessons and developing a staff training programme in response. Since the audit, the school had not permanently excluded a pupil for several years.
- Mr Smith noted that some schools in the borough excluded far more pupils than others. It was commented that the variation in the cohort was not significant enough to justify such a disparity.
- In response to a question on the work of the outreach service, it was commented that some mainstream schools were very easy to work with and welcomed the additional support offered to them, whereas others were more difficult to work with.
- New River College had an Art teacher and all pupils studying Art in the previous year attained GCSE Level 4 or above. In response to a question, it was advised that New River College made use of some art therapy approaches, however was not able to provide therapy sessions.
- A member of the public noted that some areas experienced problems with children in pupil referral units being groomed by gangs and asked if this was a known issue in Islington. In response, it was advised that all schools needed to be aware of grooming risks and New River College engaged positively with its Safer Schools Officer on such issues.

The Committee thanked Patrick Mildren, Jamie Brownhill and Nigel Smith for their attendance.

d) Briefing note – Government review of Exclusion and Alternative Provision

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, introduced the briefing note which summarised the government's response to the Education Select Committee's review of Alternative Provision. It was noted that the government did not intend to strengthen the role of the independent appeals panel in the exclusion process.

53 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE AND QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B2)**

As Councillor Caluori was not present, it was advised that any questions from committee members would be responded to in writing.

54 **WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B3)**

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.20 pm

Chair