

MINUTES of the meeting of the ATTAINMENT OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN TOPIC GROUP held on WEDNESDAY 23 MAY 2018 at COUNTY HALL

ATTENDANCE

Members of the Topic Group:

J Billing, S Gordon, D Hart, T Howard (Chairman), J Jones, M A Watkin

Other Members in Attendance

D Andrews, T Douris

PARENT GOVERNOR / CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES (VOTING)

*J Sloan

Officers present:

Hertfordshire County Council

Simon Newland, Operations Director, Education

Michelle Diprose, Democratic Services Officer

Charles Lambert, Scrutiny Officer

Witnesses

Ben Fuller, Herts for Learning

Andrew de Csilléry, Managing Director, Herts for Learning

Alan Gray, Head Teacher, Sandringham

Beth Honour, Head Teacher, Marriotts

Rachel McFarlane, Education Director, Herts for Learning

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

1.1 The Topic Group noted the appointment of Tina Howard as Chairman of the Topic Group for the duration of its work.

2. TOPIC GROUP INFORMATION

2.1 The generic topic group information was noted.

3. REMIT OF THE TOPIC GROUP

3.1 The Group noted its remit and scope.

ACTION

4. SCRUTINY OF THE ATTAINMENT OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

- 4.1 The Group received a series of presentations and took evidence from a number of witnesses during the course of the scrutiny. The main points arising from witnesses are summarised below. Background information provided to Members may be viewed at; [Attainment of Disadvantaged Children Topic Group](#)
- 4.2 **Charles Lambert, Scrutiny Officer** gave an introductory presentation and provided Members with an overview of the background to the Attainment of Disadvantaged Children.
- 4.3 **Simon Newland, Operations Director, Education Children's Services** provided a presentation to the Topic Group setting the context of the broad role and responsibilities of the County Council in relation to disadvantaged children. Members heard that the DfE set out the definition in relation to disadvantaged children.
- 4.4 It was noted that in the past the County Council were responsible for all state-funded schools, although now only have the direct statutory responsibility for about twenty percent of secondary schools in Hertfordshire as the remainder have become Academies. The group were informed that whilst the Council did not have any direct responsibility towards the Academies standards in these schools remain an important concern. A major challenge for the County was effective engagement with all of them.
- 4.4 A local authority must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards. Its responsibility for maintained schools were: oversight of standards, monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. The DfE's view was that Local authorities should focus their activity on the schools they maintained rather than academies which were accountable to the Secretary of State. However, should a local authority have any concerns about an academy's standards, leadership or governance, they could raise these directly with the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- 4.5 The group were informed the majority of funding for school improvement had been removed from the County Council's control. The government re-introduced national funding for schools through the strategic school improvement fund which was allocated via the DfE and RSC's. Schools received a 'pupil premium' which is allocated to schools of approximately £36m and targeted at disadvantaged children. The group heard that schools had to be transparent in how that money was spent.
- 4.6 The large proportion of small schools with children receiving free school meals (FSM) generally struggled with attainment as there was greater pressure on their budgets.

- 4.7 It was noted that FSM did not map precisely on to disadvantaged children data and part of the reason was because some families did not qualify for FSM but did have disadvantaged children. The group were informed the criteria for disadvantaged children receiving FSM were based on a history of six years of the family and although some families go through a period of being disadvantaged they would not necessarily apply for FSM.
- 4.8 It was noted that some Hertfordshire children did not use the schools in Hertfordshire as they were on the borders of the county and a Member believed these children were disadvantaged.
- 4.9 In relation to breakfast club at schools it was noted this data was not currently collected. In response to a Member question it was also noted that a school could use the pupil premium in whichever way it chose to and not necessarily to fund breakfast clubs. Concern was raised that if schools did not fund the breakfast club for disadvantaged children that a child may only have one meal a day.
- 4.10 The County Council had a strong structure of local partnerships and the key priority was to maintain and develop a “Family of Schools”. Some of the local partnerships were with:
- Schools Forum – major role in resource allocation and policy formulation, active schools engagement
 - Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) executive and local groups for SEN issues
 - Hertfordshire Association of School Heads (HASSH) and local groups
 - PHF and local groups
 - Special school heads
- 4.11 It was noted officers were happy with the way Herts for Learning (HfL) were operating and its school improvement strategy which was covered in the contract between the Council and HfL. The contract was funded by de-delegated schools i.e. predominately primary maintained schools.
- 4.12 In relation to school forums and SEN the group noted it had its own set of powers and the recommendations put forward by them were taken seriously to form policy
- 4.13 **Ben Fuller, Herts for Learning** provided the Topic Group with a response to the questions detailed in the scoping document from the perspective of the role of HfL. The presentation outlined the key performance indicators at Key Stage 4, there were:
- % of students attaining a ‘standard pass’ (Grade 4) or above in both English and maths GCSEs
 - % of students attaining a ‘strong pass’ (Grade 5) or above in both English and maths GCSEs
 - Attainment 8 score

- Progress 8 score

Members noted that the 'Progress 8 score was a new PI.

- 4.14 In relation to the County Council's statistical neighbours Members were informed ten other local authorities (LA) along with Hertfordshire were measured against each other and the criteria was normally that all LA's were socially and economically similar. It was noted that most statistical neighbours had the same issues as Hertfordshire.
- 4.15 Members were given an overview of the 'Attainment 8 Score' and how it was designed. It was noted the factors used to convert alphabetical GCSE grades to point scores in Attainment 8 had been changed and has had an impact on Attainment 8 scores. . The group also noted the Attainment 8 scores for 2017 were comfortably above national and statistical neighbours.
- 4.16 Members were given further information in relation to:
- Key Stage 4 – disadvantage gap
 - Key stage 2 – disadvantaged gap
 - Early years – disadvantaged gap
 - Key stage 4 – attainment by district / school status / selection status
 - Key stage 4 – progress by school status

It was noted that there was a large gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in schools

- 4.17 **Andrew de Csilléry – Managing Director, Herts for Learning.** responded to the Topic Group from its perspective
- 4.18 The Topic Group were informed that closing the gap in attainment for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils was one of the two agreed strategic priorities for HfL's core contract with the County Council. The other was to continue to increase the number of schools rated good and outstanding.
- 4.19 It was noted HfL had provided greater challenges to schools and effectively used progress and attainment data to target schools to participate in key projects.
- 4.20 In relation to the 'diminishing the difference' project, it was noted the schools who participated reduced the size of the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. HfL were targeting schools with the biggest gap, this was primarily primary schools.
- 4.21 Members were concerned that they had not been informed earlier of the Peer Review which had been commissioned by the County Council and believed they should have been involved. The review was carried out by education leaders and consultants from Eastern

Region LA's. Members heard the review identified a number of different strengths. These were:

- The clear awareness of the priority for improving attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils
- The strong networks and collaborations of schools
- Some schools were able to achieve good outcomes for Disadvantaged pupils
- A strong desire to share and disseminate best practice as widely as possible
- No obvious gaps were identified in the tactics and practices deployed in schools

The review also highlighted some opportunities for improvement. It was noted to address the improvements identified HfL had appointed a new Director for Education Services who would continue to focus on closing the gap for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils; support the County Council to update its school improvement strategy and make improvements to systems and processes to disseminate best practice and supporting data and to facilitate more school to school support.

- 4.22 It was noted the growth mind-set culture is shared by all the staff at HfL and there was a relentless focus on high quality and good teaching.
- 4.23 **Rachel Macfarlane - the new Education Director, Herts for Learning** provided a presentation outlining her background and the vision for closing the gap for disadvantaged children.
- 4.24 Rachel informed Members that she was previously appointed to a school with high deprivation which now was a high achieving through school moving away from primary to secondary process. Her ethos was there was 'no limit to potential outcomes of any child'. She believed each child needed a 100% commitment and getting the ethos and culture of a school was fundamental to its success.
- 4.25 She stated that the cultural way was for schools not to get to know the families but she believed that knowing the 'gap' of each child was essential and she visited every family at home to get to know them and was able to highlight the issues and challenges that faced the child. Her team were able to work with the families before they crossed the line of being disadvantaged.
- 4.26 She reiterated that teaching needed to be exceptional over all subject taught and data needed to be examined forensically.
- 4.27 In relation to closing the gap HfL's way forward is to identifying and codifying what is working in Hertfordshire; the 'Great Expectations Programme' would use system leaders to share, observe, carry out peer reviews and write up effective practice; building capacity for the strongest to inspire, coach and support those whose schools have a

bigger gap.

- 4.28 The Group agreed that this approached was incredibly refreshing and exciting. Members were delighted Rachel was on board and were confident that she would deliver the changes needed to address the attainment gap of disadvantaged children.
- 4.29 In relation to a Member query of there not being any mention of children looked after in the data it was noted they were included in the category of pupil premium children.
- 4.30 Members were informed of a conference that was taking place and requested that they be kept informed of any future ones scheduled.
- 4.31 In relation to how Governors would take forward it was noted there had been a meeting with Hertfordshire Association of School of Governors to get key messages out to schools.
- 4.32 **Alan Gray, Head Teacher, Sandringham** gave a presentation from the perspective of the Sandringham School
- 4.33 Members heard the performance of the Sandringham School for 2016/17 was high and the progress 8 score was well above average at +0.85.
- 4.34 Members noted the performance of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students at KS4 2016/17 and the percentage gap for Grade 4+ in English and Maths was -7.7%, for Grade 5+ in English and maths was -14.9% and the attainment 8 score was 0.13.
- 4.35 It was noted that Sandringham had the same expectation of pupil premium children as they did for all children. The school would help students to achieve as highly as possible, the school provided a place for students to work if there is no place at their home and they provide assistance for visits / trips out if the family cannot afford.
- 4.36 Members were informed of the key priorities for Sandringham which its funding was allocated to, these were:
- Attendance
 - Wellbeing
 - Aspiration
 - Parental engagement

It was noted the school would work with students to ensure they would not be singled out and career guidance support was given for pupil premium students to help them achieve higher.

- 4.37 The Head teacher reiterated outstanding teaching in each lesson was contextual and the highest quality staff with strong teaching skills inspire young people.

- 4.38 In response to a Member comment on how to get non performing schools to improve it was noted that the schools could 'lend' their teachers through alliances to support those schools that were lower achieving. All schools had good teachers but if teachers could not communicate with children then it would not help the students' progress.
- 4.39 It was noted there were some area of the county that was hard to recruit teachers to and it would be helpful if the local authorities could re-introduce housing for key workers.
- 4.40 **Beth Honour, Head of Teacher, Marriotts** gave a presentation in perspective of Marriotts school.
- 4.41 Members heard that in 2012 Marriotts was placed into special measures and in 2013 Beth Honour was appointed to transform the school and with a recent Ofsted inspection is now placed at 'Good' with 'Outstanding' Leadership and Management and Pastoral Care. The presentation covered:
- Data for disadvantaged students
 - The schools approach
 - Ethos and culture
 - High expectations
 - Robust accountability
 - Redesigned curriculum
 - Closing the gap
- 4.42 It was noted that mental health issues in schools were increasing and there were lots of performance pressures and social media on young people but there were steps in place at the school to support the student.
- 4.43 In relation to mock exams Members noted that if a student at Marriotts did not do well, they would be required to re-sit the exam. It was noted the teachers were on board as were parent and students. Parents were included from induction at year six and eighty percent of parents attend the information advice and guidance meetings that were organised by the school. Teachers work closely with parents to support their child. There are extra lessons available for students in the morning before school starts and the school also operates tuition on a Saturday morning.
- 4.44 It was noted there was Pastoral care in classes to support disadvantaged children and will rotate throughout the day.
- 4.45 In response to a Member query it was noted the school did not have any problems in engaging with the traveller and gypsy community.
- 4.46 In response to a further Member query if there was any guidance in preparing primary school children for entering secondary school it was noted that teachers from the Marriott visit primary schools to

share information on the children and what they like to do. Extra visits for vulnerable children were in place and interventions are in place when they start Marriotts.

4.47 **Simon Newland, Operations Director, Education Children's Services** summarised the day's evidence and highlighted the common themes throughout the day which covered:

- Expectations
- Quality of teaching
- Expectation of teachers
- Attention to detail

The County Council's role in the process is not one of direct responsibility for all schools, but it did need to set a context for all schools, including teaching school alliances so they can work collaboratively.

4.48 In response to a Member question on what the strategy was for focusing on various areas of schools, it was noted the biggest challenge was to get every school to see they are part of the bigger community. Some Head teachers need to be encouraged to lift their head above the parapet and see what other schools are doing. Part of the role of HfL was to break down the barriers and get them to engage.

4.49 There were concerns raised on those schools that did not use Hertfordshire Improvement Partners (HIP).

4.50 In response to a Member query it was noted that HfL were working with a number of schools in relation to SEND, however not all schools buy services from HfL.

4.51 Members thanked all officers that provided evidence and were pleased to hear how passionate they all were.

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 It works with Herts for Learning (HfL) to implement the Great Expectations programme, across Hertfordshire by September 2018; and that seminars sharing effective practice with school leaders will have been held by December 2018 to help close the attainment gap.

5.2 It works with HfL to set annual targets for closing the attainment gap in all Hertfordshire schools. The setting of annual targets should be accomplished by December 2018.

5.3 It works with HfL to develop a programme of engagement with all schools, capturing good practise and advises the leads of academies and maintained schools on how to help improve performance. The programme of engagement should be

implemented by December 2018.

Michelle Diprose
Democratic Services Officer
May 2018