

EDUCATION MONITORING PANEL

Meeting: 6 January 2009
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Mark Weldon (Chair) in the Chair; Councillor Colin Foster (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Ben Alexander, Owen Breen, Jenny Humphreys and John Pantall.

Also in attendance:

Councillors

Councillor Paul Porgess

Officers

Richard Bates	-	Service Director (Learning & Achievement), Children & Young People's Directorate
Julie Eltringham	-	Headteacher, Virtual School for Looked After Children, Children & Young People's Directorate
Sue Guy	-	Head of School Improvement, Children & Young People's Directorate
Maria Kidd	-	Head of Service, Services for Young People, Children & Young People's Directorate
Emma Storer	-	Children's Services Officer (Inclusion), Pupils, Parents & Schools Service, Children & Young People's Directorate
Chris Braithwaite	-	Democratic Services Officer, Chief Executive's Directorate

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received for this meeting of the Monitoring Panel.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ben Alexander for the meeting of the Monitoring Panel held on Tuesday, 16 September 2008.

2. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 16 September 2008 were approved as a correct record.

3. EXCLUSIONS

A representative of the Service Director (Learning & Achievement) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which provided the Monitoring Panel with data with regard to the number of teaching days lost due to exclusions for the 2007/08 academic year. It was reported that for the 2006/07 academic year (the latest year for which data for the Council's statistical neighbours was available) Stockport was the best performer for primary school permanent exclusions among its statistical neighbours, and ranked fifth among the eleven statistical neighbours for secondary

school permanent exclusions.

However, the Council was the worst performing among its statistical neighbours for secondary school fixed period exclusions. The 2007/08 academic year had seen a 24% reduction in the number of teaching days lost due to fixed term exclusions, however it was likely that this trend would be reflected across all Local Authorities due to the introduction of a statutory duty for schools to provide full-time off-site for pupils from Day six of any exclusion over five days.

With regard to the reward element targets for exclusions in the Local Area Agreement, it was reported that the target for the number of teaching days lost was likely to be met, but that the target for the number of permanent exclusions was less likely to be met as the Highfields Pupil Referral Unit was currently at full capacity, as was the Alternative Curriculum Experience for 'high risk' Key Stage 4 students, along with the performance of Windlehurst School which had caused a reduction in the options for the referral of challenging students.

A number of programmes to reduce the number of exclusions were ongoing, such as Managed Pupil transfers, transition projects for Year 6 pupils with behavioural difficulties moving on to secondary schools and training for secondary school governing bodies.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The range of programmes in place to act to prevent exclusions in secondary schools, rather than react to them, was discussed. It was reported that a number of schemes which had been successful at primary school level would be evaluated and adapted for use in secondary schools.
- The future of funding for programmes which were currently funded as part of the Local Area Agreement was agreed to be a high priority.
- Further information was sought with regard to the training of secondary school governing bodies, which was focused on the pool of governors who attended Disciplinary Panel meetings. It was reported that attendance so far had been very good.
- The degree of overlap between figures for persistent absence and fixed term exclusions.
- It was agreed that the benefit of reducing exclusions could be extremely significant, as young people who had been excluded from school were considerably more susceptible to engaging in or becoming the victim of criminal activity.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

4. PERSISTENT ABSENCE IN STOCKPORT

A representative of the Service Director (Inclusive Communities) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Monitoring Panel with information detailing the problems of persistent absence in Stockport's secondary schools. The number of children in the Borough classed as persistently absent by the DCSF has qualified Stockport for "intensive support" from the DCSF, the highest level of support available. A directorate-wide strategy was being developed to tackle the problem of

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persistent absence in Stockport, which would cover both primary and secondary schools to develop positive and maintain positive attitudes towards the attendance of school in both parents and students.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The importance of a strong educational culture in schools, particularly with regard to the understanding of the importance of attendance, in tackling persistent absence. The sharing of good practice across schools was discussed.
- Similar to excluded children, persistently absent children were at a greater risk of engaging in or becoming the victim of criminal activity, and therefore the importance of tackling persistent absence could not be underestimated.
- The issue of children as carers as a cause for absence was discussed.
- The degree of overlap between persistent absentees and exclusions, both in terms of the statistics and the type of students most at risk of both.
- The need for checks and audits of registers to ensure that attendance figures are accurate, particularly given the responsibility for safeguarding pupils.
- The effect on the statistics of pupils taking holidays during term times and the potential for the management of this was discussed. It was reported that permission for holidays during term time were granted at the discretion of each schools' Headteacher.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Service Director (Inclusive Communities) be requested to submit an updated report to the meeting of the Education Monitoring Panel on Monday, 14 September 2009.

5. REPORT ON THE JUDGEMENTS FROM OFSTED INSPECTIONS AUTUMN TERM 2008

A representative of the Service Director (Learning & Achievement) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Monitoring Panel with the judgements of all Ofsted inspections during the 2008 Autumn term. All nine schools inspected received a judgement of “good” or better, with three schools rated as “outstanding”. Three schools were inspected for the second time under the new inspection framework which came into force in 2005, and all had either improved or remained “outstanding”.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. REPORT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP BOARD

The Service Director (Learning & Achievement) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the establishment of the Education Partnership Board, one of the six boards which report to the Children's Trust (which in turn reports to the Stockport Partnership Board). The Board had met twice and agreed its remit, focus and terms of reference (which were included in the report). The two key areas of concern highlighted by the Board in its first two meetings were the levels of persistent

absence and the rate of permanent exclusions from schools.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD PILOT ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2007-2008

A representative of the Service Director (Learning & Achievement) submitted the annual progress report of the Virtual School Head Pilot scheme (copies of which had been circulated).

The Virtual School Head Pilot had been running for 18 months of its two year programme, and was felt to have had a strong positive impact on the performance of the Virtual School in Stockport. There had been a particular improvement in Key Stage 2 and GCSE results during the pilot, and overall there had been significant progress in reducing the attainment gap between Virtual School pupils and pupils in mainstream schools. The increased level of school engagement in the pilot, both from teachers and governors, had been particularly encouraging.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The financing arrangements for Looked After Children who enter higher education. It was reported that Looked After Children had their fees paid for them, and under the Care Matters: Time to Deliver White Paper Implementation Plan each Looked After Child in higher education would receive a grant of up to £2,000.
- The key outcomes desired from the Pilot.
- The quality of PEP Action Plans, which was noted in the annual report as a concern.
- The benefits of stable placements for children in the Virtual School Programme.
- The perceptions of Children in Care of the improvements in their education during the Pilot. It was reported that the young people had not been informed of the pilot to avoid any possible stigma through their knowledge of being treated differently from young people who were not in care. However, it was hoped that they would have perceived an improvement to the level of education they had received.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. WINDLEHURST SCHOOL - UPDATE

The Service Director (Learning & Achievement) provided an oral report to update the Monitoring Panel on the performance of Windlehurst School since the last meeting of the Monitoring Panel.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Monitoring Panel was reminded that the next scheduled meeting of the Monitoring Panel would take place on Tuesday, 17 March 2009.

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The meeting closed at 8.05pm

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