

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Monday 25 March 2024

NOTE: This was held as an informal remote meeting

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Helen Rowbottom (Chair), Daryl Brown, Mercy Umeh, Lucy Richardson and Aliya Afzal-Khan

Co-opted members: Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillor: Councillor Alex Sanderson (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers:

Jacqui McShannon (Strategic Director of Children's Services)

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services)

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND)

Georgina Herry (Head of School Effectiveness)

Elizabeth Spearman (Head of ACE and School Admissions)

Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Eleanor Allen, a co-opted member from London Diocesan Board for Schools.

Councillor Mercy Umeh had apologised for her lateness in joining the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2024 were agreed to be an accurate record.

4. EDUCATION PERFORMANCE DATA

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND) briefed members on the Education Performance Report for academic year 2022/23. He took members through the early years: Good Level of Development (GLD), key stages 1, 2, 4, 5 and SEN performances, as well as attendance and exclusions. He also introduced the outcomes of the Virtual School and Ofsted inspection as set out on pages 19 to 24.

The Chair asked about the changes in the early year foundation framework. Georgina Herry (Head of School Effectiveness) explained that there were changes in the implementation of a more rigorous framework introduced to schools since 2021. Comprehensive training session was run by the Department for Education (DfE) to upskill the nursery sector. On DfE's rationale in revising the framework, Georgina noted that there were reflections from practitioners and after looking at the GLD outcomes that the framework should dig deep into some key areas of the early foundation stage such as understanding of the world.

Councillor Lucy Richardson was concerned about the types of schools in the borough covered in the figures and whether the Council would help with issues like attendance and exclusions in some of schools like academies. Peter Haylock advised that the Council provided necessary support based on the information on individual schools no matter whether they were an academy or not. The additional support had contributed to the strong results at key stage 2. On exclusions or suspensions, the current policy and guidance was such a decision could only be made by the head teacher at the secondary schools. H&F schools could use the Social Emotional Mental Health Outreach offers provided by the Council to help support the young individuals who might experience behavioural changes or find school a particular challenge. The Council's INSPIRE service, education psychologist and joint communication teams could also provide support to schools and academies in matching the needs of the young people. While these teams were very responsive to schools seeking support, they might intervene by looking at relevant data such as the number of applications for education and healthcare plan (EHCP) and contacting the schools if they had not engaged the service of these teams.

In response to Councillor Richardson's further question about exclusions, Peter Haylock noted the Council's commissioned alternative provision provider would receive a referral for the excluded young person via the ACE team within six days for school placement. The Council monitored the provider via a School Improvement Board looking at all key metrics and by running a specific attendance focus group. Peter added that the School Effectiveness team worked closely with academies and held head teachers' meetings with strong attendance. As regards attendance, Peter

noted the DfE would be issuing statutory advisory guidance this September for councils to provide early help to schools and support to families. H&F would like to do more as it was a key area for improvement. Councillor Richardson appreciated the Education team's hard work.

Nandini Ganesh (Co-optee) was concerned how to assess young people's different needs and prioritise support for them as some needs, for example, the ECHP might lapse by the age of 25. Peter Haylock advised that the School Effectiveness team gathered information through the autumn term on young people's destinations and then worked to ensure they were in employment/ education training and ensuring that the number of unknown cases was reduced. Georgina Herry said those who were unknown could be due to having moved abroad, or outside H&F, some potentially had moved to private schools. Different internal teams, professionals and service coordinators worked to ensure the tracked information was joined up with regard to tracking the young people's needs in a coordinated approach.

On Nandini Ganesh's further question on the SEND sufficiency review carried out the previous year, Peter Haylock noted the progress was being made under the recommendations of the review. The first area had been to ensure the special schools and providers were clear about the different requirements. The team was now working with external partners who were evaluating bids from schools for setting up additional resource bases and units. The main launch of the new units and resource bases was expected to be around September 2025.

Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan sought information on the breakdown of persistent absence among different types of schools and the extent of intervention by the Council. Peter Haylock noted the Council had implemented a tracking tool in relation to the DfE guidance for schools to complete around attendance. Specific school attendance officers were targeted to give support to primary as well as secondary schools. A new program providing daily live feeds in terms of attendance enabled the team to think through how the services could better support the schools.

Replying the Chair's question about the focus for the coming education year, Peter Haylock noted the team would continue supporting the primary schools in particular the early years to make sure the data could improve and become strong. Another focus was supporting schools to improve on attendance as well as exclusion/suspension which were a real challenge. On factors limiting intended changes, Peter noted that resources should be allocated in relation to the statutory responsibilities added by the DfE on attendance.

Councillor Alex Sanderson (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) highlighted the complex education landscape across H&F. The education team had maintained a good working relationship with the schools and their communities and was able to influence/manage challenging policy issues. She remarked that the attendance challenge was a national issue and it was paramount for the central government to fund education properly.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the report.

5. CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION AND ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

Elizabeth Spearman (Head of ACE and School Admissions) explained the work of the ACE team was related to attendance, child employment and children in entertainment, and elected home education (EHE) and children missing education (CME). The team dealt with the statutory aspect of attendance by issuing penalty notices following a referral from schools. She noted every single pupil was tracked, and those who had been served a penalty notice since September showed improved attendance. The team was also responsible for licensing of children who were involved in stage productions and modelling. The portfolio of the ACE team also covered permanent exclusions and made referrals within six days for offer of alternative provisions.

Elizabeth Spearman introduced the report which referenced the key legislation and DfE guidance that governed local authorities work with two cohorts of children, i.e. CME and those whose parents/carers had elected to home educate. It provided data relating to the numbers of both CME and EHE children over the past 5 years. She noted the number of CME peaked when the country welcomed arrivals from Afghanistan and then Ukraine. Smaller peaks were also seen during the two school admissions rounds, if parents were dissatisfied with the school offered and chose to wait for a preferred option. s. The number of children known to be EHE before the pandemic was about 80+ which was in line with the national picture. The figure went up to around 200 at the height of the pandemic and fell again to the current 130 which was still significantly more than that before the pandemic. Elizabeth remarked as long as the parents/carers were committed to providing home education proactively, the Council was keen to support all parents'/carers' who elected home education.

Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan was concerned whether the DfE had stated any minimum requirements for those who EHE in relation to curriculum and assessment. Elizabeth Spearman noted that according to the law, home education had to be "suitable"; this was not defined in law or guidance. As such, EHE did not have to follow the national curriculum, children did not have to be tested nor sit any public examinations like SAT/GCSE. , The DfE guidance expected each local authority to devise their own policies and guidelines for home education but specified that those opting home education had no obligation to inform the local authority of their intent H&F had made it a policy to see every home educated child and their parents/carers that was notified to the local authority. The Council also suggest a broad and balanced curriculum to equip the child to take their place in society. If there were concerns deeming the home education provision was not suitable, the Home Education Advisor would interact with the family and turn things around skilfully, such as advising on the programme or encouraging the child going back into school. Replying to Councillor Afzal-Khan's further question, Elizabeth confirmed that mandated subjects at school were not required to be covered in home education.

The Chair asked about comparative data on education outcomes of EHE. Elizabeth Spearman noted families often wanted to set up their programme undisturbed in the first three months of de-schooling their children. During that period, officers from CME or EHE might work with them and a percentage of families would decide EHE

was not the right choice and be supported to register the child back into school sometimes after mediating disagreements with the school concerned. For those families committed to proceeding with home education, they would be guided on what was expected and encouraged to cover some of the subjects that the child would usually learn at school. That said, the families were entitled to choose alternatives. Elizabeth added that the above had made data measuring challenging.

Nardia Taylor (Co-optee) was worried about the safeguarding checks for children who were home educated without the knowledge of the Council. Elizabeth Spearman noted that for those children with an allocated social worker, who were removed from school for various reasons, the Home Education Advisor would alert and work closely with the social worker who might make more regular contacts with the families. Peter Haylock added that if a child had not registered with education, they might have done so with other authorities like health or housing. Sharing of information within the limitations of GDPR as and when appropriate helped identify and support these children.

Nandini Ganesh (Co-optee) asked whether parents/carers could apply for EOTAS (education other than at school) funding for home education. Peter Haylock noted that an EOTAS package had been agreed for a small number of young people with an EHCP which however did not sit within the ACE team.

Councillor Alex Sanderson (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) appreciated the brilliant work of the ACE team in providing home education service and looked forward to a more forceful legislation coming through to require registration. Elizabeth Spearman noted the annual home education family event to be held in the coming summer.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the report.

6. PRIVATE FOSTERING

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services) presented the report which provided an overview of private fostering, duties of the Council and community, challenges faced and further support needed. The presentation covered definition of private fostering, legislation and legal duties, expectations around best practice and challenges, local context and next steps.

Responding to the Chair's question, Amana Gordon noted private fostering was looking after a child that you were not related to under an informal arrangement. That was why the Council needed to assess those arrangements. On the Chair's further question about the networks or groups through which information were obtained under the pan London approach, Amana advised that private fostering would be discussed by practice leaders for London group, London Safeguarding Children Board, children social care practitioners and ERS leaders. She said that although there was legislation, it was not being enforced. The appetite for the relevant bill in terms of possible impact such as welfare concern was not yet there too.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the report.

7. ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH VOTER REGISTRATION - FOR INFORMATION

Members noted the information paper which set out the main activities being undertaken by Electoral Service and the Youth Services to encourage young people living in the borough to register to vote.

The Chair and Councillor Alex Sanderson (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) exchanged views on the date calling for Mayor election and the General Election. The Chair highlighted the report on getting young people registered to vote ahead of upcoming elections. She noted that H&F had been doing very thorough programme to engage young people through a range of different means for voter registration and bring in their voices for the future.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the following dates of future meetings:

- 24 June 2024
- 11 November 2024
- 28 January 2025
- 22 April 2025

Meeting started: 7.01 pm
Meeting ended: 8.47 pm

Chair

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