Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 9 March 2022 at 10.30 am

This meeting was held remotely and a recording can be viewed on the Council's website

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Robert Ward (Chair), Sue Bennett, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Bernadette Khan and Louisa Woodley

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming

Apologies: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons and Ola Kolade

PART A

10/22 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

11/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no urgent items for the Sub-Committee to consider at this meeting.

The Chair advised the Sub-Committee that it was likely an additional meeting would be held on 22 March 2022, to consider the issues raised about the work of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership from the recent report on the death of a child in the borough.

12/22 Task and Finish Group Final Report: Exclusions and Off-rolling in Croydon Schools

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out in the supplement to the main agenda, which detailed the final findings from the Task and Finish Group set up by the Sub-Committee to review the issues of exclusions and off-rolling in Croydon schools. This was the second part of the report, with the first part being approved by the Sub-Committee on 18 January and subsequently endorsed by the Cabinet.

The Chair of the Sub-Committee thanked all the members of the Task and Finish Group for the significant amount of time and effort they had invested in producing their reports, which was extremely comprehensive.

The report was introduced by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick, also thanked the other members of the group for

their support in the preparation of the report. During the introduction provided by Councillor Fitzpatrick, the following was noted.

- There was a huge number of competing demands on school leaders, including the need to be inclusive and keep children in schools. Conversely, market demand required the delivery of good exam results to ensure the high placing of a school's position in league tables, pulling demand in the other direction.

- Ofsted had previously highlighted concern nationally that some schools may be gaming the system through off-rolling pupils that may lower scores. It was understood that there may have been instances of this in some Croydon schools.

- The review undertaken by the Task and Finish Group had identified nine key findings, which were outlined onpages 3 & 4 of the report.

- These included the finding that there was an increased number of children attending schools with significant additional need.

- There was a piecemeal system of schools across the borough which had been exacerbated by academisation, which made it more challenging for schools to cooperate.

- The key to ensuring inclusion was to get to the root of the problem, which required early diagnosis.

- Additional support was required to help manage the transition process between schools at the earliest possible stage.

- It could be challenging for parents who wanted to have their autistic child educated in mainstream education as a proportion of schools were not equipped or able to provide for the needs of these pupils.

- The Group had found examples of schools refusing unannounced visits from the Council, which raised questions about what was happening in these schools.

- Elective home education was an area of concern for the Group, which questioned whether the Council had sufficient policy to deliver it. There was also a huge backlog in reviewing home education provision which needed to be addressed. The need to have an increased focus on elective home education had increased following the Government's recent announcement of local authorities needing to maintain a log of home schools and to ensure these pupils were being suitably educated.

- There was a concern that the part of the elective home education policy that fell onto social care colleagues had not been taken on board, which may result in future safeguarding issues.

- Draft government guidance was likely to have huge implication for managed moves and alternative provision. One key point of the new guidance was a child would now be dual registered at both old and new schools with the purpose of seeking to reintegrate them back into school. This would mean that Croydon schools were retaining far more pupils than they do at present. The guidance would also end the practice of punishment rooms. It also meant that groups of schools would need to work together to commission alternative provision to address a child's needs, which would increase the level of school-based commissioning.

- The Council has until 31 March to respond to the Department for Education consultation and it was hoped this would be informed by the comments of the Group.

- Finally, the Group commended the excellent team of officers in the borough who were committed to inclusion and who would be tasked with implementing the new guidance.

Following the introduction by Councillor Fitzpatrick, the Council's Director of Education, Shelley Davies, provided a response, thanking the Task and Finish Group for its work and open dialogue with officers. It was important to note that the report had been delivered at a time when the Service was looking at inclusion and the recommendations made by the Group would be taken forward and responded to formally. There was a need to make sure both school leaders and parents understood what needed to happen to ensure the new policy was effective. A review of the Fair Access Panel also needed to be undertaken with school leaders as a collective. Finally, it was emphasised that this work would be delivered across Children's services.

Following the introduction to the report, the Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions about the information provided. The first question concerned one of the findings of the Task and Finish Group that further work was needed to find the root causes of a pupil's behavioural issues. It was questioned how far back a school could be expected to investigate and whether this would also include the child's parents. In response, it was acknowledged that it could be difficult to identify the root cause of behavioural issues, but there were examples of good practice in some secondary schools in the borough. However, it was important that both primary and secondary schools were able to implement these processes at the right time and that they were appropriately funded for this work. If schools were unable to deliver this work within their own expertise, there were many other good services available who could mediate between schools and parents.

It was highlighted that children's centres could be resource to work with children and parents to identify the root causes of behavioural issues and as such it was positive that these services were being maintained. It was important that the Government and other funding sources provided the level of funding required by schools to deliver effective services to support children at risk of exclusion. There was also a disproportionality in the ethnicity of

children being excluded, which needed to be addressed, including revisiting the curriculum to ensure it was relevant for all pupils.

It was noted that quiet rooms were being retained, which could be a good thing if they were not misused. It was agreed that the use of quiet rooms should only be viewed as one of a range of options that could be used by schools and needed to be used in conjunction with other support. A benefit of quiet rooms was the space they provided for the child to reflect, which was part of the road to self-regulation.

It was highlighted that the best practice schools were likely to be the ones who were doing well without a lot of funding. As such it was questioned what the Council could do to encourage the sharing of best practice and to support schools with training. It was agreed that there were schools delivering inspiring work that needed to be shared and it may be beneficial to encourage schools with similar challenges to work in partnership. There also needed to be a system in place to help children and their parents to navigate the system as this could be a significant barrier to the delivery of support.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Chair noted that an excellent report had been provided by the Task and Finish Group and the Sub-Committee agreed to forward it to the Cabinet for its endorsement. It was also acknowledged that navigating the education system could be challenging for parents and as such any assistance that could be provided to help them understand what was available and how it could be accessed was to be encouraged.

Resolved: The Children and Young People Sub-Committee agreed to:-

1. Receive and note the report of the Task and Finish Group.

2. Endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group and refer the report to the next available meeting of the Cabinet to seek its endorsement.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Signed: .....

Date: .....