

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 24 August 2017.

Present:

Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair)	Councillor Alan Lafferty
Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Paul Aitken	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Mr Des Morris
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

Attending:

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Also attending:

Ursula Scrimgeour, Depute Head Teacher; Julie Gallacher and Lynn O’Brien, teachers; Rachel Stoll, Head Girl; William Campbell, Head Boy; Chloe Mason, and Alex Oliphant, pupils, Isobel Mair School; and Kieran Cooper and Ewan Galbraith, pupils, Woodfarm High School.

Apologies:

Councillors Caroline Bamforth and Jim Swift; and Dr Frank Angell.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

104. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

105. Under reference to the Minute of meeting of 21 June 2017 (Page 33, Item 25 refers) when a report on early learning and childcare containing reference to the requirement to submit to the Scottish Government by 29 September an initial plan to achieve the implementation and delivery of 1140 hours of early learning and childcare had been

approved, Councillor O’Kane explained that, in order to give the committee the opportunity to consider the proposed plan, give feedback to officers, amend the proposals if appropriate and submit the plan to the Scottish Government by the required deadline, it was proposed to bring forward the date of the next meeting of the Education Committee from Thursday 5 October to Thursday 28 September. Details of the final arrangements for this proposed new date would be provided in due course by the Deputy Chief Executive.

The committee agreed to the proposed change of date.

DREAMS COME TRUE WEEKEND 2017

106. Councillor O’Kane welcomed staff and pupils from Isobel Mair School and pupils from Woodfarm High School who had attended the recent Dreams Come True Weekend at Lochgoilhead Outdoor Centre.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that a number of young people with additional support needs from Isobel Mair School and some from mainstream secondary schools had attended the event. Each young person had been partnered with a senior pupil from S5 who had volunteered to be a “buddy” to that young person over the weekend, the group also being accompanied by members of staff giving a total of more than 90 people. The young people from Isobel Mair School and each secondary school had a number of additional support needs including mobility impairment and communication barriers and the event had been structured in such a way as to help build confidence in these young people and help build relationships with their peers and “buddies” through challenging but fun events and activities and through the provision of the opportunity to interact in a social setting. The event had been judged a great success by all who had attended.

The young people presented a number of photographs to members of the committee demonstrating the range of exciting activities in which they had taken part over the weekend and explained what they had gained from attending the event. It was also explained that a reunion was planned for later in the year at which the pupils would celebrate their achievements at Lochgoilhead including a number of Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver Awards achieved by pupils from Isobel Mair School. The “buddies” from Woodfarm High School explained how they had made new friends and increased their own self-confidence and also commented on the positive relationships which had developed between themselves and the pupils from Isobel Mair School.

Councillor O’Kane, supported by other members, commended the valuable experience gained by all of the participants. On behalf of the committee he congratulated all of the young people who had taken part in the event both from Isobel Mair School and their “buddies” and also thanked those members of staff who had worked so hard and given up their weekend to ensure that the event had been such a success.

OVERVIEW OF SQA EXAMINATION RESULTS 2017

107. Councillor O’Kane invited the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), Dr Mark Ratter, to give a brief overview of attainment in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in East Renfrewshire schools in 2017.

Dr Ratter explained that the 2017 SQA results were outstanding across all the key measures. He also explained that the achievements of young people in East Renfrewshire

had rightly attracted much publicity and that the Education Department was delighted with the results across its secondary schools. He expressed the view that the committee would again be pleased to acknowledge the examination results with local young people managing to outperform the previous best ever S5 and S6 results.

Whilst explaining that a fuller and much more detailed presentation would be made to a future meeting of the committee, he highlighted a number of particular achievements including, amongst others, young people in S4 achieving the second highest ever results at level 5 and the third highest ever at level 4; 95% of the year group achieving 5 or more qualifications at level 4 or better, and 76% achieving 5 or more qualifications at level 5 or better, down marginally from 77% in 2016. Barrhead, Mearns Castle, Williamwood and Woodfarm had their best ever S4 performance at level 5 with S4 pupils at Barrhead achieving a 13% increase in the proportion achieving 5 or more National 5 exams. Across the authority, 271 pupils (20% of the year group) achieved 8 or more grade A passes at National 5, a similar performance to that in 2016. This demonstrated very clearly the high quality of learning and teaching in East Renfrewshire schools.

He also highlighted that the results for S5 pupils in Highers had been the best ever with increases in all measures. 184 pupils had achieved 5 or more Highers at grade A with almost a quarter of the original cohort in St Ninian's achieving this exceptionally high standard. Barrhead, Eastwood, Mearns Castle, St Ninian's and Woodfarm had all had their best ever S5 results with the proportion of S5 pupils in Mearns Castle achieving 3 or more and 5 or more Highers increasing by 6% and 8% respectively. At Advanced Higher in S6, the authority had also achieved its best ever performance with 39% of the original year group achieving 1 or more Advanced Higher awards, up from 38% in 2016. St Luke's, St Ninian's and Williamwood had achieved their best ever results for the proportion of S6 pupils achieving 1 or more Advanced Highers.

Dr Ratter concluded by saying that the improvements at S4, S5 and S6 in the 2017 SQA results provided further clear evidence that the department had raised the bar for all pupils and was delivering on its vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*. He again explained that a future meeting of the committee would be provided with a fuller presentation looking in detail at the excellence and equality agenda and in particular how the bar was being raised for key groups including the most disadvantaged learners.

Councillor Buchanan congratulated the Director and her team on another set of impressive results whilst cautioning that it was becoming more difficult to continue to perform at such a high level. He also welcomed the evidence that progress was being made in pursuit of the department's equalities agenda and the ongoing efforts being made in raising attainment levels for all learners.

Councillor Lafferty, whilst welcoming the excellent examination results highlighted, reminded the committee that increasing attainment also meant securing the best possible outcomes for all young people and commended the Department's wider agenda including vocational education which sought to make the best of the opportunities presented to all learners.

Responding to a comment by Councillor Aitken, Dr Ratter explained that there was no room for complacency regarding these results and that the department would not be satisfied until all schools were consistently achieving their best ever results.

Having heard Councillor O'Kane thank Dr Ratter for his presentation, the committee noted the report and that a fuller and much more detailed presentation would be made to a future meeting.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY – REVIEW OF 2016/17 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18

108. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 25 August 2016 (Page 2013, Item 2152 refers), when it had been agreed that a further report would be provided at the end of session 2016/17, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education reviewing progress in achieving the key objectives in health, safety and security in 2016/17. The report also looked forward to the forthcoming year noting that the department remained committed to health, safety and security issues and setting further goals for 2017/18. A copy of the Education Department Annual Health, Safety and Security Report accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) reported that the department remained committed to maintaining and improving its standards in health, safety and security and this was evidenced by the work undertaken in 2016/17 and the planned activity for 2017/18 contained in the departmental Annual Health, Safety and Security Report 2017. Priority areas for 2017/18 included, amongst others, the completion of fire warden training for 20% of schools; a review of Standard Circular 33 – Safety in Outdoor Education – A Code of Practice; the implementation of a revised policy to relevant staff in dealing with malicious calls, suspect mail and security breaches in restricted areas; and the development of an on-line school excursion form. She concluded by explaining that consultation with staff and trade union representatives on health and safety matters took place in the first instance through the department's Health and Safety Committee with any major issues being escalated through other consultative forums.

Mr Morris welcomed the objectives outlined for 2017/18 and commended the department for its quick response in making available training for appropriate staff on the use of ladders. He also commended the practice of joint management/trade union inspections and expressed the view that he would like to see even more of these taking place throughout the coming year. Referring to instances of abuse of teachers, he expressed concern at the increased level of physical abuse but welcomed the reduction in reports of verbal abuse. He also welcomed the fact that the department took the issue of abuse of staff very seriously and explained that the trades unions encouraged the use of the online AIRS reporting system to report all instances of abuse of staff.

Responding to a question from Councillor Aitken regarding comparisons with other education authorities, the Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) explained that no direct comparisons were available, that thresholds varied widely across authorities, and that in relation to the high number of staff employed locally the number of instances of abuse was very low. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the majority of instances of physical abuse involved a small number of pupils primarily from Isobel Mair School and pupils moving into the area from other authorities with the high level of behavioural support offered by staff quickly leading to a reduction in challenging behaviour in the latter group.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the progress made in 2016/17 in achieving the Education Department's agreed health, safety and security objectives;
- (b) approve the health, safety and security objectives recommended for 2017/18; and
- (c) instruct the Director of Education to provide a further report at the end of session 2017/18.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2016/17

109. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the year end performance of the Education Department based on performance indicators in the Outcome Delivery Plan (ODP) 2016 -19. A copy of the Education Department Year End Report 2016/17 accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) reported that progress against the performance indicators and activities in the ODP was reviewed on a six-monthly basis and the report set out a high level summary of the performance of the Education Department throughout 2016/17 under the headings of; Outcomes, Customers, Efficiency and People. A number of key highlights under each heading were included along with areas where further improvement was necessary. He went on to explain that the information presented in the report represented a very positive picture overall.

Responding to a question from Councillor Aitken relating to the lower level of absence amongst teaching staff compared to local government staff as a whole and whether there were any examples of best practice in this regard employed within the Education Department which could be adopted more widely across the Council, the Education Senior Manager explained that a more targeted approach was required in dealing with non-teaching staff. She also explained that the implementation of service reviews across the department had led to an increase in stress levels amongst staff and that this had impacted on the level of absence. However, she explained that a wide range of occupational health support was available to all Council staff and that the department actively encouraged staff to make use of this support as appropriate. In conclusion, she explained that the ageing demographic across the entire workforce would inevitably lead to an increase in absence associated with long-term health conditions such as instances of cancers etc.

Having heard Councillor O'Kane commend the generally positive picture outlined in the report as well as highlighting those areas where further improvement was required, the committee approved the report as a summary of the Education Department's year end performance for 2016/17.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADMISSIONS AND THE TRANSFER OF PUPILS FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY TO ALL EAST RENFREWSHIRE ROMAN CATHOLIC AND NON-DENOMINATIONAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

110. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of how the arrangements for admission and primary to secondary transfers had operated in the first year and seeking approval for minor amendments to the associated policy documentation. Copies of the policy document and the associated guidance accompanied the report.

The report explained that on 20 December 2016 the committee had approved arrangements for the admissions and transfer of pupils from primary to secondary in respect of all Roman Catholic and non-denominational primary and secondary schools. These arrangements had come into effect in January 2017 and provided the policy context and the procedures for allocating school places for the session commencing in August 2017. Given that this had been the first year of operation of these arrangements, the report provided an overview of the process.

The Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) reported that, by 30 April 2017, 1,262 East Renfrewshire P1 pupils had been allocated a registered place, 97% of which had

been in the school that had been applied for. Three schools had been oversubscribed by those wishing a P1 catchment place and as a result 34 children had been allocated a place at their alternative catchment school or at the school which had been identified as their second choice, and 7 children had been redirected to an alternative school.

Similarly, 1,143 East Renfrewshire S1 pupils had been allocated a registered place at their catchment school or another East Renfrewshire school that had been applied for and where a placing request could be granted. No secondary schools had been oversubscribed and just under 180 placing requests had been granted to non-East Renfrewshire residents for S1 places.

By the end of July the anticipated P1 roll for August 2017 was 1,317 and that for S1 was 1,328.

She concluded by explaining that the management of school places was an ongoing process as the department sought to meet changing family circumstances and in particular to accommodate late applications for catchment places in time for entry in August 2017.

Councillor Buchanan congratulated the Director and her team for the considerable amount of work that had gone into producing the original policy and associated documentation and for the detailed analysis of this year's figures which had led to the proposed amendments. He expressed the view that East Renfrewshire was again a victim of its own success in this regard and that this was leading to unsustainable pressure on school places.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the content of the report; and
- (b) approve the amended policy documentation as appended to the report.

CHAIR