

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 20 November 2014.

Present:

Councillor Elaine Green (Chair)	Councillor Mary Montague
Councillor Paul O’Kane (Vice Chair)	Councillor Jim Swift
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Vincent Waters
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Reverend Thomas Boyle
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Ian McAlpine	Mr Alan Munro
Councillor Gordon McCaskill	

Councillor Green in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (School Performance and Provision); Ken McKinlay, Head of Education Services (Culture, Sport and Continuing Education); Marie Kelly, Education Senior Manager (Quality Improvement); Mark Ratter, Education Senior Manager (Planning and Reporting); and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Also attending:

Linda Congalton, Head Teacher, Eaglesham Primary School.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1292. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT ON EAGLESHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY CLASS

1293. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the results of the report by Education Scotland following their inspection of Eaglesham Primary School and Nursery Class. A copy of the inspection report accompanied the report.

The Education Senior Manager (Quality Improvement) was heard relative to the report in the course of which she explained that in assessing the quality indicators in the school Education Scotland had found three aspects of the work to be very good and one indicator was judged to be good. Similarly, in the nursery class three indicators were judged to be very good and one indicator was judged to be good. Key strengths were highlighted, these being confident and articulate children who enjoy learning; very good attainment in literacy and numeracy; the overall quality of pastoral care for children; and the teamwork and commitment of the head teacher and staff. Two areas for improvement were highlighted indicating that the Department and the school should continue to develop the curriculum ensuring relevance, challenge and enjoyment in children's learning and provide tasks and activities which promoted more active learning and were well matched to the needs of all children. An action plan to address these agreed areas for improvement had been drawn up and the Quality Improvement Service (QIS) would work closely with the school to support its implementation. The QIS would revisit the school within 18 months to review the impact of the improvement plan in addressing the areas highlighted for improvement and to provide a progress report to parents.

Councillor Lafferty, supported by other members of the committee, congratulated all those associated with this very good report which reflected well on the staff, pupils, and the wider community, explaining that the school was at the very heart of the local community.

Mrs Congalton, Head Teacher, explained that everyone connected with the school was delighted with the report which reflected the passion of all concerned; thanked the committee for its support and positive comments; and commended the hard work of staff, pupils, parents, the wider community, the Education Department Directorate and the QIS.

Having heard Councillor Green, on behalf of the committee, offer Mrs Congalton best wishes on the occasion of her forthcoming retirement, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the content of the Education Scotland report on Eaglesham Primary School and Nursery Class; and
- (b) approve the school's action plan to address the agreed areas for improvement.

TOWARDS FLEXIBILITY IN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PROVISION

1294. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 3 October 2013 (Page 695, Item 738 refers), when it had been agreed that proposals would be brought forward to introduce a degree of flexibility for parents in accessing the increased entitlement to free early learning and childcare as announced by The Scottish Government, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval to introduce, from August 2015, some flexibility for parents to access the additional 30 hours within the 600 hours of early learning and childcare which preschool children were entitled to under the provisions set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (the Act).

The report explained the background to the issue and outlined the draft statutory guidance that accompanied the Act which explained The Scottish Government's expectation that provision would be built up through year-on-year flexibility and choice; that there would be annual incremental increases in funding to enable education authorities to increase flexibility and choice on an annual basis; and included estimated increased levels of funding from 2014 to 2019.

The report went on to explain that the department had carried out a consultation exercise in 2013 to ascertain the views of parents on accessing the additional 30 hours of early learning and childcare and this had resulted in a model which gave parents both choice and flexibility in accessing the additional provision. It was also explained that the model only allowed for flexibility in the additional provision but that there was an expectation on the part of The Scottish Government that authorities would move towards parents being able to access their full entitlement to meet their individual needs. Detailed information regarding the current availability of places across the authority and details of a number of planned new-build and conversion projects designed to increase the availability of 52 week provision was included along with a timeline giving a “best estimate” assuming affordability and completion of the necessary consultations.

The report concluded by explaining that The Scottish Government had allocated additional capital and revenue funding to support the implementation of the Act to introduce flexibility in accessing the additional 30 hours of early learning and childcare within the 600 hours. It was explained that this funding should meet the revenue costs associated with the approach proposed in the report in addition to the annual budget exercise which takes account of new provision as a consequence of demographic and other changes. The capital required to fund the new-build and conversion projects outlined had been submitted for consideration through the Council’s capital planning process and could be part-funded through the additional Scottish Government capital allocation. Subject to approval of the proposals outlined in the report and in order to publicise the changes to the procedures associated with applying for and allocating pre-five places, the department would undertake a publicity campaign aimed primarily at those parents and carers who had already applied for places as well as new parents and partner agencies. A copy of a draft information leaflet was attached as an appendix to the report.

Responding to an enquiry from Councillor McCaskill regarding the effective use of scarce staff resources, the Director of Education confirmed that a contingency existed to allow the rebalancing of resources across the authority in order to ensure a balance between demand and resource. She also advised that the Act imposed a requirement to consult with parents every 2 years to ensure that the Council was continuing to meet, as far as possible, their needs and aspirations. She went to explain, in response to Councillor Fletcher who raised the issue of lack of flexibility in the Giffnock area, that the department’s view was that the current education estate would be unable to cope with anticipated future demand but that steps would be taken, as far as possible within current financial constraints, to “future proof” current expansion plans. She also undertook to include updated information to the committee within the annual pre-five education report.

Having heard Councillor Lafferty express the view that significant challenges remained for the Council, notwithstanding the proposed increases in capacity already planned, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve the department’s plan to increase incrementally flexibility for parents in accessing the additional 30 hours of early learning and childcare; and
- (b) instruct the Director of Education to take appropriate steps to communicate to residents the proposed changes to the procedures associated with applying for and allocating pre-five places.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE FOR TWO YEAR OLDS

1295. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education setting out the steps taken and for the proposed expansion in places for two year old children to meet the Council's duties under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (the Act).

The report outlined the estimated number of two-year old children from workless/jobseeking households across the authority based on the latest published data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) indicating that 107 places would be required in 2014/15. It was also explained that from school session 2015/16 and beyond the Council would be required, under the terms of the Act, to provide 600 hours of early learning and childcare for all two-year old children from families eligible for free school meals. Based on the average number of children entering primary school across the authority and taking the percentage of children in each school entitled to free school meals, it was anticipated that an additional 90 places would be required from August 2015 to enable the Council to meet its obligation under the Act.

The report went on to outline how capacity would be increased across the authority including completion of new family centres in Auchenback and Busby and extended provision within Glen, McCready, Arthurlie and Madras family centres. These proposed changes indicated that sufficient capacity would exist to meet the Council's obligation under the Act as well as addressing the needs of two-year olds from vulnerable families who did not qualify under the workless/jobseeking households or free school meals criteria. Thereafter, any remaining unused places could be offered for sale to parents wishing to access early learning and childcare for children aged under 3 years.

Responding to an enquiry from Councillor McCaskill regarding the uptake of places, the Director of Education explained that the majority of referrals were submitted by health visitors on behalf of parents or carers and that although current provision was based on an uptake of 70%, the Council was obliged to plan for 100% uptake in the future. She also undertook to include regular updates on the level of uptake to the committee through the annual pre-five education report.

Following further brief discussion the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the steps taken by the Education Department to expand the number of places available for two year olds from August 2014; and
- (b) approve the proposals to expand further places available for two year old children from August 2015.

PRESENTATION – ATTAINMENT AND SQA EXAMINATION RESULTS 2014

1296. Councillor Green invited Dr Mark Ratter, Education Senior Manager (Planning and Reporting), to make a presentation on attainment and the performance in SQA examinations in East Renfrewshire schools in 2014.

Dr Ratter provided a comparison of East Renfrewshire performance in 2013 against its comparator authorities highlighting that East Renfrewshire remained the top performing authority for 5 or more awards at Intermediate 2 in S4 and 3 or more awards at Level 6 in S5. He referred to the outstanding 2014 S4 results with 5 or more awards at Intermediate 2 increasing again this year to 71 per cent. In addition, in 2014 the best ever S5 Higher results had been recorded (1 or more and 3 or more awards at Level 6) and Advanced Higher

results in S6 were also at their best ever level. All schools in East Renfrewshire performed well when compared to similar schools throughout Scotland and the level of awards had also increased. He advised that results for all East Renfrewshire young people had improved over recent years, including the lowest performing 20% and that young people from the most deprived backgrounds, as measured by the Scottish Indicator of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), performed well above comparator groups nationally as did pupils from more advantaged backgrounds. He advised that the authority would continue to seek further improvement in order to raise the bar in terms of attainment for all learners.

Dr Ratter explained that a new set of national measures had been introduced this year which introduced the concept of “virtual comparators” across schools and local authorities. He expressed the view that as a result of the introduction of this new suite of measures, some visibility across the range of measures and comparisons had been lost when compared to the previous year’s measures. He also explained that the department was taking every opportunity to press for this visibility to be restored.

Councillor Fletcher, whilst welcoming the excellent results achieved by East Renfrewshire pupils, expressed his frustration at the withdrawal of data to allow meaningful comparisons to be made with other authorities highlighting that parents had a need to know how their children’s school was performing compared to others. In response, the Director of Education stated that she would write to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of The Scottish Government to press for full transparency of the results to be re-established and that the department would continue to publicise the results in their current format to parents through a variety of communication channels. She also explained that the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) were also working to develop and share comparative data on a range of further measures to be added to the information made available to local authorities.

Responding to an enquiry from Councillor Swift who asked if the Council might consider a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all other Scottish local authorities in order to obtain the data required to enable the comparisons to be generated locally, the Director expressed the view that such a move was considered overly aggressive and reiterated that she would continue to press for the data to be made available through the channels previously described.

A number of members commented on the links between attainment and deprivation and welcomed the inclusion of those measures which highlighted the effects of SIMD. Responding to a comment from Mr Munro who highlighted the potentially adverse effect on future performance of reducing resource availability in light of ongoing budgetary constraints and the high cost of early intervention, the Director, supported by the Head of Education Services (School Performance and Provision), explained that the department adopted a “data rich” approach in order to enable it to target scarce resources most effectively; would continue to set challenging but stretching targets for all schools; and would not consider any lowering of those targets with a view to minimising the effects of budgetary pressures on young people in order to give them the best possible start in life. The Director also undertook to arrange a presentation to a future meeting of the committee with input from a few head teachers on the impact of the additional funding for the lowest performing 20%.

Having heard Councillor Green thank Dr Ratter for an interesting and informative presentation, the committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the presentation; and

1230

- (b) that a letter be sent jointly from the Convener for Education and Equalities and the Director of Education to all schools thanking everyone involved in the education system for their achievements.

CHAIR