

SELECT COMMITTEE ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Thursday, 18th November 2004 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Ridley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Dunn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Boys, Mrs Coulter, Finch, Hart-Bowman, Mrs Pearce,
Rahman, Rogers and Wright; Mrs Chapman, Mr Hatton, Mr Guest, Mrs
Hewitt-Clarkson, Mr Nottingham, Mrs Roe and Mrs Simms

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of
Education and Lifelong Learning, the Assistant Directors of Education
(Access and Inclusion Division),(Community Education Division)and
(School Effectiveness), the Senior Manager for Pupil Access and the
Senior Support Manager (Directorate of Education and Lifelong
Learning) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6th
October, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of a Personal Interest in accordance with the Members'
Code of Conduct, were made by the following members in respect of item
number 5 on the agenda (Data, Trends and Developments relating to
Exclusions, Attendance, Admissions and Children in Public Care for the
2003/04 Academic Year), in so far as the item related to the school(s) for
which they were governors, in view of their governorships, which were as
indicated:

Councillor Boys – Leasowes School and Community College
Mrs Chapman – Quarry Bank Primary School
Councillor Mrs Dunn – Rufford and Huntingtree Primary Schools
Councillor Mrs Coulter – Netherton CE Primary School
Councillor Finch – Castle High School

Mr Guest – Netherbrook Primary School
Councillor Hart-Bowman – Bishop Milner RC School
Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson – Wollescote Primary School
Mr Nottingham – The Crestwood School
Councillor Mrs Ridley – The Coseley School and Netherton CE Primary School
Mrs Roe – Redhill School

A declaration of a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Mrs Coulter in respect of item number 5, in so far as it related to the Pupil Referral Unit, in view of her chairmanship of the Management Committee of the unit.

A declaration of a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Mrs Roe in respect of item number 5 in view of her employment as a teacher within the Borough.

A declaration of a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct was made by Mrs Simms in respect of item number 5 on the agenda in view of her being a parent of children at Bishop Milner School.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Ryder.

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DATA TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO EXCLUSIONS, ATTENDANCE, ADMISSIONS AND CHILDREN IN PUBLIC CARE FOR THE 2003/04 ACADEMIC YEAR

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted containing statistical information on exclusions, admissions, attendance and children in public care in Dudley Schools for the 2003/04 academic year.

(a) Exclusions and Attendance

The annual exclusion report was set out at Appendix 1 and contained data relating to both permanent and fixed term exclusions. It was indicated in the report that exclusion data was now reported to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on a termly basis.

Headline analysis showed a 49% increase in the number of permanent exclusions compared with the 2002/03 academic year. The majority had occurred in the secondary sector, rising from 50 in 2002/03 to 80 in 2003/04. There had also been an upward trend in primary school exclusions, with an increase from seven to nine in the year. Fewer statemented pupils had been excluded but exclusions for children in public care had increased from four to nine. The report stated that the main reason cited for permanent exclusions had been violence and aggression to staff and/or pupils. 41 out of the 91 pupils permanently excluded had not been reintegrated within 15 days and the report stated the main reasons for this as being lack of parent/child co-operation and lack of suitable places.

In relation to fixed term exclusions, these had increased by 14% in 2003/04 over 2002/03 and represented a loss of just over 10,000 school days.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) emphasised that the increase in exclusions, both permanent and fixed term, in 2003 had been consistent with trends locally within the other Black Country authorities and nationally.

The report indicated the following as factors that should have a significant positive impact on reducing exclusions; an exclusions protocol, which had been agreed with secondary schools and implemented from September 2004; support for secondary schools on behaviour or attendance issues from a Key Stage 3 Behaviour and Attendance Consultant; and the development of a 'preventing exclusions strategy', which would include a change of role for Pupil Referral Units to enable them to work with pupils at risk of exclusion, instead of providing solely for excluded pupils. The Assistant Director also referred to the impact that additional funding for Excellence Clusters might have on preventative issues in relation to exclusion.

On the issue of attendance, the report indicated that absence rates in both secondary and primary schools had showed a marked improvement on the previous year and that the overall absence figure of 6.9% was above both the national mean and that of the Council's statistical neighbours. In order to continue this improvement, the work of the Education Welfare Service had been refocused to aim at the schools with relatively high levels of absence but reducing the level of service of schools with relatively low levels. Reference was made in the report and in the presentation by the Assistant Director to research by the DfES which had confirmed a strong correlation that existed between free school meals and absence and attainment and the establishment of a new public service agreement target based on this research which aimed to reduce the 2003 national level of absence by 8% by 2008 with the focus being moved away from 'unauthorised absence' to 'total absence'.

A question and answer session followed in relation to exclusions and attendance issues. As a point of clarification, it was confirmed that future graphs on absence would show performance against targets. A request for further information on the correlation between white males and anti-social behaviour was made.

In relation to the information provided on the number of pupils permanently excluded per 1000, in relation to Dudley's statistical neighbours, the Senior Manager for Pupil Access clarified the nature of the information available to the Council from other authorities. In this connection he confirmed that, while the figures were available, the manner in which they had been arrived at was not always made evident. In reply to a comment made that it would be of great relevance in addition to having figures for Dudley to obtain statistical information from the other West Midlands Local Education Authorities and the Council's statistical neighbours, the Senior Manager for Pupil Access confirmed that meetings with the other Local Education Authorities at which data was shared were held regularly and that exclusions in those authorities were increasing at the same rate as Dudley's.

One member noted that there appeared to be a disproportionate figure of exclusions in relation to the children of mixed race and the Senior Manager for Pupil Access agreed to supply data on this issue to a future meeting. Regarding the reasons for permanent exclusion, clarification was requested in relation to those pupils who had been so excluded for 'other' reasons, in response to which the Assistant Director for Education (Access and Inclusion) stated that particular categories were set by the DfES and that Heads generally used the category of 'other reasons' where the exclusion did not relate directly to one of the DfES categories. At the request of a member, the methodology regarding the target to reduce absence by 8% by 2008 was explained.

In reply to a question on school attendance of children looked after by the Council, regarding leave of absence during term time, the Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) indicated that a policy existed in each school and that the Education Welfare Service encouraged schools to persuade parents not to take their children out of school in term time. Endeavours were also made to change attitudes of foster carers and other staff involved on this matter and, while the issue continued to need addressing, matters were improving. The Chairman commented that this issue had been noted in OFSTED reports.

In response to a question on the reasons why the number of exclusions appeared to be rising more greatly in proportion to the number of pupils at school, the Senior Manager for Pupil Access indicated that this was due partly to the more methodical, 'stepped' approach now being taken by schools with regard to exclusions. In response to a further question on the facilities made available to pupils excluded from the Pupil Referral Unit, the Senior Manager indicated that those pupils were provided with work at home in the same manner as a pupil excluded from a school.

Regarding absences caused by children returning to their mother country, it was confirmed that this was still a problem but that attendance was being improved by the instigation of study programmes for the pupils concerned while they were away.

In response to a question on the impact on exclusions of a perceived diminishing of staffing numbers in the Education Welfare Service, the Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) indicated that, while she was not aware of a decrease in staffing levels in that service, there had been some long term staff absences. However, the Education Welfare Service did not have a significant involvement in exclusions. The Assistant Director also confirmed that there had been no reduction in the budget for the Education Welfare Service. In reply to a question on whether the rise in the number of exclusions was due to a worsening in the behaviour of the school population, it was stated that, while this might be the case, the Council was now far more vigilant regarding children out of school. Arising from discussion on the finance of £750,000 that was to be made available to the schools in Excellence Clusters the point was made that there were troubled children who needed one to one support in all areas, and not only in areas of deprivation. In response the Senior Manager for Pupil Access referred to the systematic interventional approach to behavioural problems now being undertaken. In response to a further comment on the need to separate disruptive pupils from pupils working normally, the Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) referred to the importance of support in the home and the impact of the Children Act. A question was asked on the facilities available in Dudley for pregnant schoolgirls, in reply to which it was indicated that there was no specific unit for this purpose and that such pupils had entitlement to receive education in their mainstream school. It was also reported that the Council had met its targets in the ten year teenage pregnancy strategy in full.

On statistical information regarding reintegration, some surprise was expressed at the numbers of parents who were failing to co-operate. In relation to the figures on violence and abuse of teachers, the point was made that members of staff were being threatened both physically and verbally and needed to be protected.

(b) Admissions

The report indicated that the School Admission Service administered transfers from primary to secondary school as well as admissions for oversubscribed community primary schools. In addition, the service administered the process for parents moving address either within or into the Borough as well as dealing with applications from parents without a change of address but who wished to change their child's school during the year.

The report contained information in relation to mid year transfer requests from local schools, together with comparative figures for the autumn and spring terms 2003/04; information in relation to key mid year admission processes for 2002/03 and 2003/04 and the September admissions processes for the 2004/05 academic year. It was indicated that requests for transfers from out of borough secondary schools had steadily reduced during 2003/04, although the percentage of requests received from pupils who had additional educational needs, exclusions or attendance issues had increased greatly during the summer term. A large percentage of mid year applications received for Dudley secondary schools were for children who had additional educational needs, exclusions or attendance issues, although this did not appear to be a trend in the Primary phase.

No questions on admissions were asked but, in view of the late circulation of the appendices giving statistical information on this area of service, owing to an administrative oversight, it was agreed that any questions on the statistics be submitted to the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for a response.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted be received and the information contained in relation to school exclusions, attendance, admissions and children in public care be noted.
- (2) That statistical information on permanent exclusions, comparing Dudley's figures with those of the other authorities in the West Midlands, be submitted to a future meeting.
- (3) That information be submitted to a future meeting giving data on the number of pupils of mixed race excluded from school, in relation to other pupils.

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on progress relating to the remodelling of the school workforce.

The report summarised the background to the remodelling issue both nationally and locally. In relation to the latter, the DfES expected each local authority to reach a local agreement and the report now submitted set out the approach taken by Dudley and the position reached to date.

Further to the information contained in the report, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning reported orally on the attitude of the staff affected, which was mainly favourable. The next step would be for staff to be balloted and results were expected early in December. It was proposed that the Agreement would be affective from 1st January, 2005.

In the question and answer session that followed, reference was made to the reduction in supply teaching that would result from remodelling. Reservations were expressed by some members about the prospect of pupils being taught some of the time by staff not qualified as teachers, in response to which the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning explained the retraining such staff would undertake before being allowed to teach. The Director welcomed the additional time for preparation, planning and assessment that would be available to qualified teachers as a result of remodelling and advised the Committee of the concerns of many head teachers on the quality of supply teaching provided currently which, he considered could be alleviated with appropriate use of other systems resulting from remodelling.

In relation to a question asked regarding whether non teaching staff would be allowed to cover for teaching staff, when absent, the Director indicated that non-teaching staff on Teaching Assistant grade 4 could provide such cover should schools choose to adopt this policy. The Director emphasised, however, that the whole operation of remodelling would have to be considered and monitored extremely carefully.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted and the information provided orally be received and noted.
- (2) That a full presentation of the remodelling issue and its implications be made to a future meeting and that, following implementation, the issue be monitored and reviewed regularly by this Committee.
- (3) That a report on the quality of supply teaching in schools be submitted to the Committee.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee, for the first quarter of 2004/05.

In response to a question on the response time for dealing with special educational needs assessments, the Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) indicated that staffing shortages in the division concerned had been largely resolved and the backlog had now been significantly reduced. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning reported on the current position regarding the schools currently in special measures.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm.

CHAIRMAN