

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 5th December, 2013.

Present:- Councillors Abe (Vice-Chair), Brooker, Carter, Davis, O'Connor, Hussain, Malik and Matloob (from 6.50 p.m.)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor P Mann

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Lynda Bussley (from 7.15 p.m.)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Sohal

PART 1

21. Declaration of Interest

No declarations were made.

22. Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 October 2013

The minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel meeting on the 10 October 2013 were approved as a correct record.

23. Member Questions

None were submitted.

24. The Role of Grammar Schools in Slough

The Panel received a report looking at the relationship between the grammar schools and non-selective schools in the borough, the impact of the selective system on attainment levels and the accessibility of the grammar schools for Slough students. The report included input from the grammar schools, a non-selective secondary school and a primary school. At the meeting the grammar schools were represented by Jo Rockall (Headteacher, Herschel Grammar School) and Mercedes Hernandez-Estrada (Headteacher, Upton Court Grammar School); the non-selective secondary schools were represented by Deborah Ajose (Headteacher, Baylis Court School); and the primary schools were represented by Maggie Stacey (Headteacher, St Anthony's Catholic Primary School and Nursery).

The Panel discussed the following points:

- that the grammar schools work as a consortium and set the pass mark for the 11+ aimed at taking the top 30% of the ability range; and that Slough students who pass the 11+ had a good opportunity of being accepted to a grammar school because of the admission criteria

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regarding distance. However, despite this, there was concern at the low numbers of Slough students attending the grammar schools;

- that the key issue is the number of Slough students passing the 11+, however lowering the pass level would not be a suitable option;
- that Buckinghamshire had introduced a new 11+ exam which could not be tutored for, and that this would be trialed in Slough in the coming year; and
- that, in order to ensure equality of opportunity, the attainment levels at Key Stage 2 and the aspirations of Slough students would need to be improved.

The Panel then discussed what could make the difference for Slough students, increasing the numbers who take the 11+ and those that achieve the pass mark. In order to offer the best school opportunities for all Slough students, the whole system would need to work together with the grammar schools working with the primaries to improve attainment levels and joint training programmes for teachers.

The Panel noted the difficulties of recruitment, but also that the focus on numbers attending grammar schools implied that the borough's non-selective secondary schools were of a lesser quality which was not the case. Members commented on the very good non-selective schools in Slough and the value added scores of these schools demonstrating that the grammar schools were not the only place for aspiration.

Resolved to:

- 1) thank all the schools for their input and attendance at the meeting;
- 2) endorse the move to make the 11+ more accessible through the introduction of a test that could not be tutored for; and
- 3) congratulate the schools on the good cooperative working that had been taking place across all Slough schools.

25. School Places: Plans for the Future

Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive Slough Borough Council, introduced the report setting out the projected demand for school places over the coming decade and the strategy being developed to answer this demand.

The projected demand predictions were based on birth rate, known pre-school children, known primary school children, and an estimate of growth based on inward migration. Based on these numbers, the current prediction of demand was that Slough would require 15 forms of entry at primary level and 38 forms of entry at secondary level by 2021/22.

There were a number of challenges facing the Local Authority (LA) in providing enough places such as the new free school system and academies which limited the LA's authority over the system, and the lack of available developable land within the borough's boundaries.

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With the 15 forms of primary entry accommodated within three schools and expansion to existing premises it is hoped that this need can be met. The expansion of the secondary provision will be more problematic, and it was probable that at some point during the planning period development would need to take place outside of the borough boundary in order to meet the needs of Slough's population. It was likely that 2017 onwards would be where need outstripped provision within the borough and the LA would be working to influence the planning of free schools in order to provide some flexibility to the system.

The Panel was pleased to see work was underway to develop a Strategy for dealing with the predicted increase in need.

Resolved – to note the information provided.

26. Vulnerable Children and Education

The Panel received a report on work taking place to support the education of vulnerable groups in the borough. Robin Crofts, Lead for Education at Cambridge Education, presented the report and was supported by Ketan Gandhi (Head of Young People's Services), Maryanne Woodland (Educational Psychologist), and Tony Browne (Head of School Services) at the meeting.

The Panel discussed the support for young people not in education, employment and training and noted that Slough's figures were generally on par with the national average. There was a lot of work taking place to improve the understanding of this particular cohort and projections of future numbers to ensure the sustainability of the agenda being developed. There were three priorities: early identification of those at risk; management of expectations; and creation of the right pathways to ensure the right opportunities were offered.

Those students qualifying for Free School Meals (FSM) had seen an improvement in attainment levels over the past four years, closing the gap at Key Stage 2. In discussing Looked After children, Members noted that there was still a considerable gap between their attainment and that of the rest of the school age population. The Panel was keen to ensure that the momentum for those qualifying for FSM continued, and that for Looked After Children stability of placement and improvements in broader health outcomes were achieved in order to improve educational attainment. In particular, Members were keen to ensure that the Pupil Premium would be correctly used to assist with this.

Resolved – to note the report.

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27. Schools Services: Contract Update

Resolved – to note the report.

28. Community Learning and Skills Services Update

Resolved – to note the report.

29. School Results: Preliminary

Resolved – to note the report.

30. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – to note the current work programme.

31. Attendance Record

Resolved – to note the attendance record for the current municipal year.

32. Date of Next Meeting - 30 January 2014

Resolved – that the date of the next meeting would be 30 January 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.30 pm)