

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - PUPIL PREMIUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Pupil Premium held in the Stour Room - Sessions House on Friday, 17 November 2017.

PRESENT: Mrs L Game (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mrs P T Cole, Mrs T Dean, MBE and Ms S Hamilton

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer - Overview and Scrutiny), Mrs K Goldsmith (Research Officer - Overview and Scrutiny), Miss G Little (Democratic Services Officer), Miss E West (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

10. **Simon O'Keefe (Principal, Stour Academy Trust)**
(Item 1)

The Chair welcomed the guest to the committee and a short introduction was given by Members.

Q – Please introduce yourself and odder and outline of the roles and responsibilities that your post involves?

Simon O'Keefe stated that he was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of The Stour Academy Trust and explained that his primary role involved setting the strategy and vision for the Trust, building the culture across the entirety of the Trust, team building and capital allocation.

Q - What is The Stour Academy Trust and what are its values?

In 2009, following his recognised achievement, the Local Authority sought help for Sturry C.E Primary School (now the primary sponsor of the Trust) and in 2010, it started its journey of federation with Hersden Village Primary School. This was primarily the start of working in strategic collaboration, providing school to school support rather than working with schools on a stand-alone basis. Within two days of the federation the school was placed into special measures, however within 9 months of rapid improvement, Ofsted had graded the school as "Good." However, Michael Gove, The Secretary for Education at that time, identified the bottom 200 worst performing schools in the county, declaring they needed to be sponsored by an academy. Given Hersden Primary's historical data it was included in this bottom 200 and hence the establishment of The Stour Academy Trust.

The Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) was approached by the Local Authority (LA), Department for Education (DfE) and the Regional schools commissioners (RSCs),

asking that it support the failing schools and seek solutions to improve and maintain a level of success.

The Stour Academy Trust worked within a strong collaborative model of school to school support (S2S), there is no stand-alone school. Simon O'Keefe noted that with the models cohesive approach, it was always seeking the very best practice and once identified, this practice was then deployed and adopted throughout other schools.

In regard to the values, The Stour Academy Trust had placed the needs of the children at the heart of its decision making and placed a heavy emphasis on the well-being and education of children above all else. Simon O'Keefe went on to elaborate further on the importance of a child's well-being and said that if a child was not ready to learn, there would be no success to measure. Prior to its new status, Sturry C.E Primary School was primarily led by the needs of the adults rather than those of the children, however due to the improvements made, the schools went on to adopt a pro-active 'can-do' attitude and removed the barriers to learning.

Q – What other schools are in the Trust?

Simon O'Keefe said that there were currently seven schools in the Trust and another opening in September. The Stour Academy Trust was attempting to collaborate however due to the scale of this, it was not possible to manage. Therefore, the schools were grouped into 4 geographical hubs, these areas would include Canterbury, Swale and Ashford. Within Swale the hub consisted of Thistle Hill Academy, Richmond Academy, Lansdowne Primary School; this hub had capacity for a further school however there was no intention to move forward with the plan at the present time. Within Canterbury the hub consisted of Sturry C.E. Primary School, Hersden Village Primary School and Adisham C.E. Primary School, again having achieved outstanding reports from Ofsted The Stour Academy Trust gained the capacity to support other schools within that area. Within Ashford, the hub consisted of Finberry Primary School and Chilmington Green Primary School that opens in September, the plan in place allowed for four primary schools to eventually consist within the Ashford hub.

The collaborative model of the Trust had allowed a mix of schools to be brought together, blending those in more challenging circumstances and environments to work alongside those who were in less challenging situations. Once the Trust had reached its strategy for growth, it had no plans to expand outside of the region.

Q – Are all of the schools in deprived areas?

Lansdowne Primary School consists of 37% of children in receipt of Pupil Premium funding, similar to Richmond Academy. Hersden Village Primary School, within the Canterbury hub, also has a high percentage of pupils in receipt of this funding.

Q - Please provide an overview of Pupil Premium allocation in your schools. Is there a clear rationale for how Pupil Premium funding should be spent, and is this communicated to all stakeholders?

Simon O'Keefe advised members that there was no quick fix, what the Trust focused on was investing its Pupil Premium into staff training and development to ensure it created a strong network of specialists to support pupils.

A Senior Social Worker was recently appointed to the Trust in 2016 and has proved to be a significantly beneficial investment. With well-being at the forefront of the Trust's values,

all academies follow an established nurturing ethos supported by trained staff that help to identify and support pupils with any emotional, social or behavioural needs. By having a high quality of teaching that was focused on early year education, this was where improvement started to be made.

It was stated that not every child on Pupil Premium was failing; many children do achieve and have a good support network at home. However, when a child is not making progress, specialist staff around the child step in to ensure each child receives specialist support bespoke to them. It is essential that both the parent and child are involved in those conversations, so the correct system of support can be developed. There was no “one size fits all” approach as different children had different types of disadvantages and must be supported on an individual basis.

Other issues such as when a child enters into early education on free school meals, did not mean that the child is labelled as low ability, they just had low experiences and have not received the same opportunities. These children are not put onto the Specialist Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) register until much later in their education. The essential aim was to immerse them within their early years into a language rich environment as reading is key to that child’s education.

Q – Please discuss the findings of the recent Ofsted report “Unknown Children Destined for Disadvantaged” (2016). In your view, to what extent is the Early Years Pupil Premium effective in promoting the academic achievements of vulnerable younger children?

Simon O’Keefe noted that he fully agreed with placing the focus on Early Years. Quite often, the pre-schools that tended to be in a disadvantaged area were often struggling to raise standards because it was difficult to recruit staff to those areas. Furthermore, when the pre-schools recruited within those areas, it recruited for the local community that may have had limited availability of staff with the necessary skills in the first place. However by finding and creating those specialist support roles within schools, the staff could engage with families and pupils from a very early stage. Taking Hersden Childrens Centre as a prime example of this it relied on people coming into the centre rather than going out to engage with families. The Trust used its Pupil Premium to ensure it had a number of trained staff within its hubs that can be deployed effectively. With stand-alone schools it would be a struggle to find that same level of specialist resources and a high level of dependency would be placed upon the teacher to carry out multiple functions. The advantage of the Trust was having the money there to use strategically to ensure specialist staff were working as a team to support families.

The Pupil Premium allocation to the Trust is £732,200 and this was to be used as affectively as possible. Standalone schools could not provide the same level of support compared to those within the Trust. For example, Simon O’Keefe stated that he had a number of Lead Practitioners who were not allocated to a specific class at his disposal that he could deploy to areas of greatest need.

Q – It is a great advantage wherever you can share resources. What more can KCC do to ensure that we improve the attainment gap?

The Trust has moved towards putting more resources into Early Years and creating those specialist roles. There was a danger that when schools were faced with financial problems, the use of Pupil Premium could be used to prop up other areas. Certain

strategies actually seek to further disadvantage Pupil Premium pupils, for example, the use of additional Teaching Assistants (TAs) in place of quality first teaching.

“The Pupil Premium grant is used effectively to provide strong, additional provision for disadvantaged children. These pupils’ progress is tracked very carefully, and exceptional tailored support is provided when needed. Leader’s actions are firmly focused on ensuring that this group of pupils attendance continues to improve, and that they are empowered to achieve highly.” (Ofsted Report, Lansdowne 2017)

It was duly noted that public services were stretched financially and therefore it was essential that best practice was identified and shared with other schools. One matter that was not mentioned within this report is recruitment and retention and if the Trust could not motivate its staff to do the work then it was a pointless exercise. It was recognised that socially deprived schools were the hardest to recruit to and with a shortage of teachers, trying to close that gap between the disadvantaged was becoming increasingly more difficult as it meant pushing the government harder.

Due to on-going growth of pupils and the continued demand for quality teaching, the decision was made to move to a Trust contract whereby teachers were employed by the Trust rather than the school itself. Such a contract meant that when a school within the Trust required additional support, teachers were given the opportunity to move with the incentive of developing their own professional development and furthering their career. Simon O’Keefe stated that this allowed him to move qualified teachers to where they are needed most; this was particularly beneficial for mid-year vacancies such as maternity cover or long-term sickness.

Q – The solution would be to pay them more?

Supply agencies were going into Universities and guaranteeing students work however with the current climate; students had the option to be more selective.

Simon O’Keefe stated that the Trust offered staff a golden hello of £1,000 in a lump sum and a good work life balance package, giving staff an additional annual leave day after two years of continuous service. What did make a real difference was the culture invested within schools, if the Trust offered high quality training and career opportunities, they stayed.

Q – In terms of Pupil Premium, what does this mean? If parents are not naturally engaged and this is crucial, what do you do to engage with them specifically, and in particular, what do you do to engage with them regarding attendance? Can you use Pupil Premium to address this?

Engaging with parents meant knocking on doors, going to physically see them at their home however staff would not be expected to attend the home alone, this was where working as a team gave staff the confidence to engage with families collaboratively and build that relationship. There were some parents that struggled to drop their children off at multiple schools, if this was the case and impacted on a child’s attendance, the school could use its Pupil Premium to pay for that child to travel to school.

It was vital that enrichment happened within the school day and not as an add-on. By making them attend additional clubs not within the school curriculum, the child was missing out on that love of learning. Schools needed to move away from judging the success of a child by figures and judging them from what they were learning and engaging with in their lessons.

The Trust approach now meant that there was a set of highly skilled professionals within schools that could talk to parents and work on breaking down those barriers.

Q – In regard to recruitment issues and the Agency Recruitment Companies trumping you, is this a burden on you? There is the potential to recruit highly skilled staff however if University students are being put into Agency work they are losing that potential skill base?

The Stour Academy Trust was due to run its own fair this year before the Agency companies went into the Universities. The Stour Academy Trust partnered with one small supplier agency which means that the agency will give The Stour Academy Trust a good supply of teachers as and when they are needed and due to the agency being used exclusively by The Stour Academy Trust, it means that they will not be charged excessive amounts. Simon O’Keefe ensures staff are retained through career and work/life packages however the remaining issue is that, if Simon takes a teacher, what happens to the school down the road who are still unable to recruit?

Q – In regard to maintaining the balance between focusing on bespoke work for the child and a whole class approach, should we be making it more of an obligation/ target for the schools to ring fence the money that don’t do it at the moment? Should we be saying that this should be the approach for all schools?

Simon O’Keefe stated that there needed to be a more robust system in place as there was a danger of budgets being squeezed, thereby causing Pupil Premium money to be used for other purposes. For instance, if the decision was made that a teacher is required instead of specialist staff, a school may have been inclined to use the money in a different approach.

Each school needed a strategic overview. There must be robustness in the system to identify strategies being used by schools and if they are used to have the impact they are supposed to. Pupil Premium money needed to be monitored and given to a group of schools that shared their resource ensuring it had a range of professions embedded within the schools to identify the need for those bespoke pupils.

Q – Is there conflict on how much you should be focusing on staff whether it be specialist staff or staff development and how much should be used for providing the extra expenses i.e. trips/ ICT etc.?

Simon O’Keefe acknowledged that in an ideal situation everyone, for example, would like to have a laptop however, unless the school can provide the quality teaching needed to say how this resource would effectively be used, it would be of no value at all. Therefore, as stated previously, a majority of the funding needed to go into developing staff and training specialist staff as it is the quality of these that support the Trust in making a difference.

For example, Thistle Hill Academy had 2 large rooms given over to specialist unit (behavioural and emotional) for a total for 14 children and was successful in integrating these children back into classrooms. However, these rooms could have been used to educate 60 Early Years children, so this resource would have had a greater impact being used as a provision for Early Years children, thus possibly eliminating the need for a behavioural/emotional unit for some of these children in later years as it would have been tackled at a very early.

Q – Sutton Trust spears to suggest that the investment of Pupil Premium money in high cost staff is not as productive as other low cost interventions. The Education Representative supported this toolkit. He said that if he were a teacher now with disadvantaged children and looking for a good quality off-the-shelf teacher programme for disadvantaged children, he would struggle to find it. Do you agree?

Simon O’Keefe stated that it was not necessary to have a teaching programme. Children need to be engaged with learning and the way to do this is to engage with the child by focusing on their interests. Children are not robots and schemes are not something that the Trust is in favour of. Children learn from good quality teaching and it is essential that those provisions are put into Early Years.

Q – Have you found a way of addressing parents who have a lack of communication skills?

A parent’s aggression is not aimed at the staff, it is usually aimed at the organisation. Staff need to have the essential training to break down those communication barriers.

For example, in regards to Sutton Trust, if the Pupil Premium is being invested into specialist staff within a stand-alone school. There is a disproportionate amount of money going into one group of staff rather than a range of specialisms across a number of areas.

Q – Can you clarify what interventions are used?

- Children arrive with low experiences not low ability
- No child is put onto the SEND register in Early Years
- Speech Link quick assessment, there is strong focus on language rich environment and language rich curriculum
- Improved quality of teaching
- Team approach, working with families as soon as possible, the younger the better
- More nurseries attached to schools with professional teachers
- Nurture teams
- Long term strategic views, not short term fixes
- Curriculum that engages and creates learners, not necessarily creating children that can pass a test
- Action research 2 year training programme
- Free school meals do not necessarily mean disadvantage – the child’s needs may be being met

Schools are generally quite good at addressing children’s learning needs but not great at addressing behavioural and social needs, there needs to be greater focus on this.

If the child’s behaviour has not improved there needs to be a different approach adopted. Do not continue to do something if it isn’t having an effect and use the Pupil Premium in a different way to achieve better outcomes.

David Carter produced *The 4 stages of School Improvement; stabilising, repair, improve and maintain.*

11. Richard Hawkins (Headteacher, Green Park Community Primary School)
(Item 2)

Richard Hawkins (Headteacher, Green Park Community Primary School) was in attendance.

The Chair welcomed the guests to the Committee and a short introduction was given my Members.

Q – Please introduce yourself and provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities that your post involves.

Richard introduced himself as the Headteacher of Green Park Community Primary School, Dover. He said that the school was a 2 form entry school located on a large, deprived social-housing estate. He said that he took over the school when it was formed from the amalgamation of the Powell and Melbourne schools and was appointed to oversee the process. Richard also worked for Kent Leaders of Education (KLE), supporting other local primary schools and other Headteachers in their roles and worked with a national agency called PiXL (Partners in Excellence) and was a member of the PiXL Associate Team.

Q – In which area in Dover is the School based?

Richard said that the school was located in an area with large amount of social-housing and was the most deprived town in Dover.

Q – Could you explain the ‘Erasmus Plus’ project in more detail?

Richard said that the Erasmus Plus project was funded by British Councils and founded through the European Union. He said the project allowed Green Park Community Primary School to celebrate the growing diversity within schools and look at ways to engage and support migrant pupils with their integration into a new country and education system.

Q – Are there many children in the School where English is not their first language?

Richard explained that there were a much smaller number of migrant children at Green Park Community Primary School than there were in schools located closer to the Dover town, he said that roughly 10% of children in the school were migrant children. He added that it was not as big an issue for the school as it was located on an estate outside of the town, but said he thought it would be more of an issue for migrant children in schools that were closer to the town centre.

Q – What are the different languages spoken by migrant children at the School?

Richard said the majority of migrant children in the school were from Slovakia, Poland and Lithuania.

Q – Do language barriers make it difficult to engage with migrant children’s parents?

Richard said that the school tended to use other parents that speak the same language which can make this much easier.

Q – Since the Pupil Premium has been introduced, have there been any different results?

Richard said that when Green Park Community Primary School was formed in 2008, the Pupil Premium did not exist, and therefore understanding the children had been different to how perhaps the now older children were understood previously. Richard said that he did not agree with ‘labelling’ the children as ‘Pupil Premium Children’ and ‘Rich Children’ as the school did not have that diversity. He said that since the Pupil Premium was introduced, the school had consistently achieved outstanding results through Ofsted reports and in the last 3 years the outcomes for the Pupil Premium at the end of year 6 have become significantly above those without Pupil Premiums nationally.

Q – In your opinion, what do you think the 3 most significant strategies were that the School used to provide excellent results?

Richard said that the following 3 strategies used within the school had had the biggest impact:

1. Providing additional support for children and work would be required in order to allow children to get the best results.
2. Pupil Premium funding allowed the school to do things that wouldn’t have been possible without it, but said these things were only valuable if they sit in a bed of excellent quality first teaching and provision for those children.
3. As a school, the issues around disadvantaged children needed to be understood as they were not simple; the school must have the ability to understand every child’s issue separately to be able to meet their needs individually.

Q – Is there any flexibility around including children into Pupil Premium that are not entitled but are disadvantaged at home?

Richard said that the school would not allow the Pupil Premium funding to be portioned equally to each child. He said that that would not be the best use of practice and that the school needed to assess where the needs were, why ways of teaching were not working for certain children and how best to meet those needs. He said that the school had identified that all of the children needed to be given additional opportunities’ whether they received Pupil Premium funding or not. The majority of the money spent was spent on excellent staff to be used well ensuring that the children had the best resources to enable them to learn. The school had made the decision to invest in an additional teacher for every phase; he said that the additional teachers were not just introduced for the Pupil Premium children, but to raise overall attainment for all children. He added that additional Teaching Assistants were invested in particularly in Early Years. He said that children needed to be engaged in school and that it was important to ensure they had the best start in life otherwise it could become difficult to re-engage the children.

Q – What issues do the School face around Recruiting staff?

Richard said that recruitment issues were difficult nationally. He said that there were not many people keen to start a career in teaching. He said that the school had Teaching Assistants who had the desire to be Teachers and therefore were funded to complete foundation degrees and do on-the-job training. He said that the school welcomed keen school leavers who wanted to pursue a career in teaching. The school worked hard to ensure that there was always a member of staff available to fill gaps when a staff member left to ensure minimal disruption for the children.

Q – Please provide an outline of Pupil Premium allocation in your school. How do you track what Pupil Premium funding is spent on? How do you evaluate the impact of Pupil Premium funding in your school?

Richard said that the Pupil Premium allocation was £225,280.00 for the current financial year. He said that the money was spent on experiences for the children, such as school trips and exciting activities to engage them in learning. He said that speech and language was a major problem within the local schools and thought that this was not just a monetary disadvantage. He said that families were talking and interacting with each other less and less meaning that children suffer and experience difficulties in terms of education and attainment. He said that many of the children in the school did not know how to do undertake basic tasks as they had never had the experience in doing these things. He talked about an experience in particular where Early Years children were taken swimming and said that 90% of the children had never been in a swimming pool before.

Q – How is the allocation of Pupil Premium funding shown on your website?

Richard said that there was a Pupil Premium statement on the schools' website which highlighted issues, and showed what had been introduced, how much had been spent and how it had been spent, what the outcomes were and what the impact was. He said that his views on how the money was spent would be very different if the Pupil Premium funding that the school were allocated had been a lot less.

Q – Would the School consider jointly purchasing expertise?

Richard said that the school would benefit from working with other schools to share resources but said that the schools would have to have a shared view with regards to what the resource would need to be. He said that the quality provision for children was the most important thing, not schemes of work.

Q – In what ways –if any – do you encourage parents and carers to apply for Free School Meals if they are eligible?

Richard said that school staff had to act as the instigators of parents applying for Free School Meals, as sometimes children were eligible but perhaps the child did not like school dinners so the parent would not apply even if it meant helping them financially. He said that as a school, it was important to ensure that parents understood that if they were to apply for Free School Meals for their child/children, more funding would be allocated for their child and in turn would benefit the family in the long run. He said that the school regularly communicated with parents to inform them on what they needed to do in order for their child to qualify for Free School Meals. He said that sometimes parents make it difficult for schools as they often do not have the documents required in order to complete the Free School Meals application. He said that parents used to be notified of Free School Meals by post, but the notifications were now sent via e-mail, therefore parents without technology could not access these easily .

Q – Are the Free School Meals included in the Pupil Premium funding?

Richard said that when the budget is set for the Pupil Premium funding, the amount of children that were entitled to Free School Meals would be entered onto a spreadsheet which formulates into the schools budget for the following year and would then be incorporated into the school census. He said that the school received the entire £2.20 per day for each child that was on universal Free School Meals, but for the children on Free School Meals only, the school only received £1.85 per meal. The school were given this money for 190 days per year which means that the school were at a disadvantage as they encouraged the children to attend school every day, therefore the budget would have to allow for the extra 35p per child per day which proved as a loss financially.

Richard said that the number of Free School Meals were submitted through the school census and that there was a standard budget, services which the authority provided get that money and then we pay it back into those services.

Q – As a School, do you think Pupil Premium and Free School Meals are the right method to use?

Richard said that he was unsure of other methods that were available to use but said that the Pupil Premium was one of the most effective systems that the school had used before overall. He referred particularly to children in year six and said that they had been disadvantaged in previous years without the Pupil Premium method and said that it was important that children of all ages in the school were getting good results and that the funding was being used in a way that did not isolate the Pupil Premium children from children that were not receiving the funding. He added that it was important as a school to be discreet and ensure that the Pupil Premium children did not feel that they were different or disadvantaged.

Q – What are your thoughts on the Kent Virtual School?

Richard said that he was not impressed with Kent Virtual Schools and felt that the school were 'jumping through hoops'. He said that Kent Virtual Schools were set up in terms of funding with the pre judgement that schools were going to waste the money that was allocated to the children. He said that having to apply for the money and make a formal list of what the school would be doing with the money limited flexibility to meet the needs of the children. He said that there could be a number of schools who missed out on funding due to the lack of staff available to apply for the funding. He said that he had looked after children from Buckingham as well as Kent and Buckinghamshire allocated £1,900 for each child and the school received the money straight away. Richard explained that the school kept in regular contact with Buckinghamshire and had certain arrangements with them.

Q – Are we saying that it helps those schools that are not good enough in their own practice?

Richard said that increase in focus through the application process was the reason for improvement and that that focus needed to be encouraged. He said for every school he had worked with the pupil processes were analysed for every single vulnerable group. He said that the communication between the teachers and himself was good and said that it was important to make sure that disadvantaged children are not placed into one group. He said that teachers needed to understand that the majority of children were coming from deprived households. He said that the data had to be refined to highlight what the school were actually looking at and trying to achieve.

Q – What is the key to improving practice in poorly performing school?

Richard said that ensuring well-trained staff were in the right roles within the school was key. He said that a major issue was if there was a member of staff that was failing and needed to improve rapidly. He said it was important to share strengths. Richard discussed working with other schools to share resources and said that if the school was grouped with another school, the Governors may want to know why a Green Park Community Primary School teacher is moving to another school to help children and whether this was free. He said that there was a cost element to lending teachers to other schools and replacing them and needed to analyse this.

Q – Do you, as a School, keep in touch with the children after they have left the School? What is the outcome when they reach 16?

Richard said that there were special provisions for all year groups such as holiday clubs, working groups during lunchtime etc. He said that children needed extra out of their school day because school alone was not enough for them because of gaps in the rest of their lives. He said that secondary schools unfortunately did not support the children in this way. He said he was regularly disappointed to hear that children that have left the school to move onto secondary school and were not making good progress because they were not supported as well. He said that the majority of year six leavers at the school had moved onto Dover Christ Church Academy which was the local secondary school, and the children were not getting to where they needed to get to, therefore Green Park Community Primary School teachers for years five and six were working with Dover Christ Church Academy's year seven and eight teachers. He said it was all about working as a team to support the children and ensure that they learn as thoroughly as possible to give them the best start in life.

Q – Are you finding an increase in neediness regarding speech and language?

Richard said that speech and language was an ever growing issue. He said that assessments were undertaken for each child to understand where they currently sit with regards to their understanding of sounds, language and linking sounds. He said that this academic year, 65% of children failed the assessment.

Q – What can KCC do, if anything, to improve the effectiveness of the Pupil Premium in closing the attainment gap between vulnerable children and their peers?

Richard said that although schools had different views, he believed that the majority of views would be based around currency, character and culture. He said that it was important to get children into school in the morning and make education fun and something that they looked forward to being a part of. He said it was important to ensure that everything the children were a part of was meeting their needs. He said that a focus group had been formed within the school but was not for low ability or disadvantaged children, it was created to change what the school were doing with the children in order to allow them to learn. He talked about the creation of a 'Forest School', where children had the opportunity to go on an adventure whilst learning and do something different. He said that two young boys that struggled with their writing made up a story that one of the school's teachers lived in the forest, so Richard played along and told them that it was a very serious matter and asked them to write a full report and give it to him. This captured the boys' interest and they spent time writing a report to present to him which focused on improving their writing skills. He said that most children only came to school to meet their friends and to play. Therefore, if that was what the children wanted to do, it was the school's duty to make it the best possible place for them to learn, have fun, play and

grow together. He said that the school had recently adopted two schools dogs, to give children the chance to become engaged, face fears and take responsibility. He said that children had started coming in early to take part in the school's breakfast club and were enjoying being at school. He said that some children were coming from a disadvantaged home with no heating, lack of food and a lack of social interaction which is why the school opened their doors at every opportunity to these children. Richard added that in terms of Kent County Council's reports, progress should be measured and presented in the reports as well as attainment, he said it was important to understand a child's starting point and level of progress made just as much as the attainment.

12. Sue Nicholson (Executive Headteacher, The Brent Primary School)
(Item 3)

1) The Chairman welcomed Sue Nicholson and Deb Unsworth to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

(2) Sue Nicholson said she had been the Headteacher at The Brent Primary School for 13 years prior to becoming the Executive Headteacher. She was currently also working for other schools in the Dartford area. She was a member of the Primary Forum and the Kent Association of Headteachers and a Non-Executive Director of The Education Company.

(3) Deb Unsworth had been the Deputy Headteacher at The Brent School for 8 years until August 2017. During this period she had led on Assessment and English and had been responsible for tracking vulnerable pupils.

(4) Sue Nicholson explained that she had developed the "Ignite" curriculum at The Brent Primary School as a means of tailoring education to the individual needs of the pupils whilst ensuring that the requirements of the National Curriculum were being met. The "ignite" curriculum needed to accommodate pupils from contrasting social backgrounds in order that they could all be progress towards maximising their potential. One example of this was that The Brent School gave Years 1 and 2 pupils the entitlement to use the swimming pool even though the National Curriculum itself did not require this activity until Key Stage 2.

(5) The Chairman noted that there were 98 pupils at The Brent School who received Free School Meals and that the funding stood at £142k. She asked whether the School sought to distribute this money equally.

(6) Sue Nicholson replied that although economically vulnerable pupils were tracked, they did not necessarily all need financial support at the same time. Pupils who were not in receipt of the Pupil Premium, but were economically, socially or educationally vulnerable were also tracked. Money was allocated to families at the rate of £152 per year, which could pay for uniforms, clubs or for activities such as the Year 2 Sleepover, the Year 4 school trip to the Rippledawn Environmental Centre or the Year 6 four nights in France trip. The fund was held by the Family Liaison Officer (FLO), which enabled the School to provide budgetary training for parents if necessary. Experience had shown that parents were reluctant to apply for Free School Meals before the child entered school, but that they did so afterwards. In preparation for admission, the Early Years Team visited every Nursery and met the families in their homes in order to talk to them about school readiness. This function was carried out by the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) in respect of casual admissions. Families sometimes experienced changed circumstances. Whenever this happened, the School would talk to the parents and

explain what the support that they might be entitled to. Personal contact of this nature was reinforced by a leaflet, which was also made readily accessible by being placed prominently within the School itself.

(7) Sue Nicholson moved on to give examples of non-financial support that was provided. If the parents did not have the reading skills to support their children, the child's reading book would be accompanied by a set of questions inserted in the front cover that they might wish to ask about the book. Reading was regarded as the key skill, so the most vulnerable Year 1 pupils and sometimes the oldest Year Rs and the youngest Year 2s would be offered a hundred focussed daily lessons by the highly skilled and experienced Reading Recovery Teacher, to enable vulnerable pupils to catch up with their peers. Additional support was provided by older pupils reading to the younger ones on a one-to-one basis. This had the additional benefit of giving the older pupils the sense that they were contributing to general welfare of the school community.

(8) Sue Nicholson discussed the recent change in the inspection regime, with inspectors better trained. She said that the Inspection Team in 2012 had not been able to consider the impact to The Brent School of admitting excluded pupils. This had meant that the excellent work that had, for example, enabled a pupil excluded at the start of Year 6 to turn his academic career around had not been fully appreciated. She believed that some schools excluded pupils in order to achieve a positive inspection rating. The new OFSTED framework specified that children with a Pupil Premium needed to be doing well according to the inspection criteria, which was a challenge, but should be every school's responsibility.

(9) The role of the identified Champion was crucial. Sue Nicholson had therefore kept that role for herself (in her capacity as Headteacher) in order that action could be taken very quickly if progress was not being made. All 98 FSM children, plus other vulnerable pupils were tracked on a termly basis, marking them in red, amber or green for attainment, progress, attendance, access to interventions, club participation and other areas. This enabled her to see at a glance whether it was necessary to intervene. *Weekly Vulnerable Children Meetings* were held, involving herself, the Deputy Headteacher and the FLO, agreeing who needed to take action. If appropriate, the FLO would visit the parents.

(10) Sue Nicholson asked the Committee to note that vulnerability did not always mean that a child was under-achieving academically. Many Pupil Premium pupils achieved the higher academic levels. She cited one child who was a high achiever and had gained a grammar school place, despite both parents being alcoholic.

(11) The ethos of The Brent School was that every single pupil needed the support to give them the best access to the educational opportunities provided. The barriers were a lack of aspiration and experience as well as access to the richness of the language. The School had therefore built a culture where children were strongly encouraged to always use technical or mature terminology rather than childlike phrases such as "please can I go to the Loo."

(12) Sue Nicholson referred to the two other schools that she currently supported. One of these was a middle class school with a handful of PP Pupils where no one seemed to be clear about who had responsibility. She was in the process of correcting this because everyone should know who it was.

(13) Sue Nicholson replied to a question by saying that the role of primary school education was to encourage the growth of the mind and skill set to access learning. It was not a matter of Reading, Writing and Maths. Nor was it a matter of child minding or

knowledge implanting. Teachers needed to improve life chances by engaging their hearts and minds. They needed to be highly skilled and passionate. They needed to metaphorically be able to keep all the plates spinning (although some needed to be spun faster than others). Sometimes, teachers had acquired their qualifications without realising how difficult the job could be, only realising at a later stage that this was not the right career path for them. There was currently a shortage of trained teachers. The Brent School ameliorated this by helping the development of staff within the School and employing Graduate Tutors as a route into teaching.

(14) Sue Nicholson said that Educationalists often felt isolated when working with disadvantaged children. Social Workers would close cases if their families did not engage with them. This could lead to the School working in splendid isolation with the pupils between 9am and 3 pm for 38 weeks in a year without support from either Social Services or Health. There was still a need for joined-up services across the county, with common vocabulary and expectations.

(15) Sue Nicholson said that KCC should look deeply at school exclusions and managed moves. She said that one School had excluded 25 pupils since September 201, and this had not been acted upon.

(16) Sue Nicholson said that she supported the grammar school system by chairing a Headteacher Assessment Panel each year. She felt that holding the Kent Test in the first week of September was particularly disadvantageous to PP Pupils. It would make a difference if the Test could be held as little as two weeks later in the year as, typically, these children needed the routine of school to be able to perform appropriately in a test situation. Many other children would have accessed a tutor over the summer break, whereas Pupil Premium children, typically, would not have done so. Therefore, the test timing led to greater disadvantage to these children.

(17) Sue Nicholson was asked whether children at the less disadvantaged end of the spectrum might feel that they were not being pushed as a result of the concentration on PP Pupils. She replied that The Brent School set out to be a fully inclusive school which helped each child to do as well as possible. It had succeeded, as evidenced by the data which placed it well above the national average. The School's "growth mindset" approach could be summed up by using the formula: "*There is no such thing as can't do it, rather can't do it yet!*" Thus maximising the learning potential of each child.

(18) Sue Nicholson was asked for her comments on the views of some schools with a small number of PP Pupils whether it would help if they were grouped together in order to share best practice. She replied that this was less important than the development of the ethos that every child needed support, including the identification of barriers to their education. She considered that if a school considered that it had a problem with the Pupil Premium, it would most likely be because it had a problem in its outlook. She noted that some Headteachers, due to workload, did not attend important meeting and considered that not doing so risked not being able to network effectively.

(19) Sue Nicholson said that the Pupil Premium should never be used to support a child in taking the Kent Test. Its purpose was to support children's ability to access and make best use of the National Curriculum.