

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - PUPIL PREMIUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Pupil Premium held in the Wantsum Room - Sessions House on Monday, 15 January 2018.

PRESENT: Mrs L Game (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr A Booth, Mrs P T Cole, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Ms S Hamilton, Mr J P McInroy and Dr L Sullivan

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer - Overview and Scrutiny), Mrs K Goldsmith (Research Officer - Overview and Scrutiny), Ms Z Galvin, Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

20. Steve Ward, Deputy Principal, Oasis Academy, Isle of Sheppey
(Item 1)

1. The Chairman explained that Mr Ward was present in place of John Cavadino, the Principal of the Oasis Academy, who was unable to attend at the last minute. She thanked Mr Ward for attending at short notice.
2. Mr Ward outlined his role as the Deputy Principal of the Oasis Academy and explained that it covered a broad range of responsibilities which included working with pupils with SEN and those who were the most able.
3. He explained that the Isle of Sheppey was unusual in terms of its educational history in that it had retained a middle school system until the early 2000s. It now had an academy which was split between two sites, one in Sheerness and one in Minster. The demographics of the two areas were quite different in that Sheerness experienced more severe deprivation than Minster. As an area which was largely rural as well as coastal and was at the edge of the county, Sheppey had had limited economic investment and so offered limited employment opportunities and limited transport options. Teachers were difficult to recruit and many pupils did not have access to the mainland and had never left the island. Although the situation had improved in recent years, there was still improvement needed.
4. Some 40% of Oasis Academy pupils were in receipt of pupil premium, a level which was way above the national average rate of 15-20%. At the Sheerness site, the number of pupils in receipt of pupil premium was 54%, and it was known that some pupils did not declare their eligibility to claim pupil premium. This was partly because parents did not want to be seen to be poor.

Mr Ward then addressed the list of questions prepared by the Research Officer and published as part of the agenda pack.

5. The focus of pupil premium in the 2017/18 academic year was to address five elements; attendance, attainment, teaching and learning, site consistency and hardship. In setting each year's focus, the previous year would always be reviewed.

Attendance – this was below the national average at 93%, having risen 1% since the 2016/17 academic year. However, this was an average figure, and the actual attendance could sometimes be as low as 78%. A consultancy, SOL, had been engaged to help the academy to address its attendance rate. The parents of absent pupils would be given a daily phone call, with a home visit being made if absence continued longer than three days. Although the academy had the power to start, or threaten to start, formal proceedings at that stage, staff took the view that this step would not be helpful, knowing the circumstances of the families concerned. The aim was always to achieve full attendance. Although 90% attendance may sound good, this meant that one in ten school days (one day a fortnight) had been missed.

Attainment - there was a gap in the attainment between pupils in receipt of pupil premium and those not. In all subjects, pupils in receipt of pupil premium were 0.3 of a grade below those not in receipt of pupil premium and the academy was committed to reducing this gap. Staff would identify pupils who were underperforming. It was known that pupils who were more able academically were still more likely to make better progress than those less able, regardless of the pupil premium status of either group, although pupils in receipt of pupil premium had more behavioural issues. The overall picture was complex and had many aspects to it.

Teaching and learning – the recruitment of good teachers was a challenge as potential candidates were put off by the poor economic and social reputation of the island and the transport difficulties it presented to anyone commuting there daily. The academy's poor rating from its most recent Ofsted inspection also did not help, as this made it difficult to attract good candidates for teaching posts. Work was in hand to improve the academy's performance and reputation but it would need to be able to demonstrate some sustained improvement in results before potential teachers would be willing to consider it as a career move. The academy was working to 'grow' its own staff from among local people and those who had previously attended as pupils, and by using the Teach First programme.

Site consistency and hardship – work was in hand to reduce the gap in the percentage of pupils in receipt of pupil premium at the academy's Sheerness site (54%) and its Minster site (45%). Eligibility for pupil premium varied across the island as degrees of deprivation varied substantially. Pupils from areas of greater deprivation experienced challenges such as a lack of correct uniform or suitable shoes and attendance at school without having had breakfast, and had more behavioural issues than those in less deprived areas. For those pupils, the academy would help by buying suitable shoes and uniform, by running a breakfast club and by providing free extra tuition.

6. Parents would be introduced to pupil premium as an available resource at the communal welcome meetings which took place when pupils started Year 6,

and each family would also have a private meeting with a member of staff at which more detail about pupil premium would be given to them. From these meetings, it was clear that some parents were unaware of pupil premium as a resource, but for others, the problem with applying for it was pride and not wanting to appear poor. A high number of families moving from other schools and areas, for example, from London, also meant that some were less aware of pupil premium. It was important also to ensure that, for families who had previously been eligible for pupil premium in another Local Education Authority, this eligibility followed them so they could continue to claim.

7. The attainment gap of 0.3 of a grade between pupils in receipt of pupil premium and those not was narrowing, and the overall picture improving, and the gap was now within floor standards. This progress had been helped by measures which it was possible to put in place as a result of pupil premium funding. These included outward bound camps for more academically able pupils, which involved confidence-boosting activities such as rock climbing and abseiling as well as revision sessions in science and English. The DfE changes to move away from the inclusion of course work to exam-only GCSEs had been a challenge for many pupils, so the academy had introduced measures such as the outward bound activities to seek to boost pupils' confidence and make learning fun. Another such measure was a science project being undertaken by some more academically-able Year 11 pupils with PhD students from ...?.. University, in collaboration with the Science Museum. However, funding for this sort of project was very limited and only ten children could take part.

8. As well as the attainment gap, there was a social gap between pupils in receipt of pupil premium and those not and this should not be overlooked. Children knew who among their classmates had pupil premium. The social stigma around pupil premium needed to be eradicated.

9. There was a threshold of circumstances which led to families becoming eligible for pupil premium. Levels of deprivation varied greatly across the island and in some places there was very little employment. Parents who had not had a good experience of school when they were young would not tend to value education, and families in which no-one had been to university would tend to have a narrower scope of education and employment ambition. The academy sought to encourage more students to aspire beyond level 1 apprenticeships and courses and to continue to university. Students taking part in the science project had already started to say that they wanted to go to university. Many pupils had to content with a number of challenges such as drug and alcohol use at home, cramped rooms shared with siblings and lack of privacy or quiet space in which to undertake study at home. For some children, school could feel like an extension of early help or social work intervention, but the academy had a good record of working with parents to encourage children back into school.

10. The most successful interventions using pupil premium had been a maths GCSE project run by a maths specialist in 2017, the science project mentioned earlier and a project called 'Period 7', which offered pupils an extra session of tuition at the end of the day.

11. The County Council could help improve the effectiveness of pupil premium by encouraging more work with the early help team, with a more joined-up process, and possibly more work with and support for years 6 and 7 as pupils transitioned from primary to secondary education. The early help service could be enhanced and could work with schools to address attendance issues by speeding up the legal process by which this was addressed. Pupil premium was a challenging area of work with a great impact and Mr Ward said he would wish to see it protected by being ring-fenced. Pupil premium should be used just for pupils who were eligible for it, and not for any other purpose. It was known that some schools used their pupil premium allocation to bolster staff salaries.

Mr Ward then responded to comments and questions from the Select Committee.

12. Asked about the financial aspect of going on to higher education, and how pupils from poorer households might manage student debt, Mr Ward acknowledged that this was part of the picture for any student considering higher education and that media coverage of it would inevitably have made an impression on pupils potentially considering higher education.

13. Asked about attendance and the external organisation which was working with the academy to address this, Mr Ward confirmed that the academy used part of its pupil premium payments to pay them. The SOL consultancy tracked cases of pupils missing school and used a colour coding to identify the severity of cases and pupils who were improving by moving them from one colour to the next. This system was easy for pupils to understand and acknowledged their progress in improving their attendance, and had shown an overall improvement. Good attendance made a real difference to the grades which a pupil could expect to achieve, with some pupils in receipt of pupil premium rising a whole grade once attendance had been improved. However, it proved difficult to persuade parents of this.

14. Asked about how pupils who could not afford uniform were identified and assessed, Mr Ward explained that cases were approached individually with the best interests of the child always uppermost. Setting a rule that any child attending without school shoes would not be permitted to participate in lessons had increased compliance, but any child who had broken their shoes, or whose family was genuinely unable to afford school shoes, could expect to be treated sympathetically. It was easier for the academy to buy a child a new pair of suitable shoes than to exclude them from lessons.

15. Mr Ward confirmed that every school was legally obliged to publish the level of pupil premium that it received and that the Oasis Academy had included on its website that its pupil premium allocation for the current academic year was £671,000 and had set out how this has been spent. Sometime pupil premium was spent in a way that meant all pupils would benefit from it, while other projects were targeted at pupils in receipt of pupil premium only. There were sometimes barriers between pupils in receipt of pupil premium and those not, and the need for some pupils to have help in buying uniform or who had free school meals made it possible to identify who had pupil premium and who had not. The academy worked to build the resilience of those facing hardship and any bullying

was taken very seriously and dealt with promptly. The academy sought to develop more unity between pupils in receipt of pupil premium and those not, and had recently introduced a payment system in the canteen whereby all pupils paid for their meal with a swipe of a finger rather than with cash, meaning no-one stood out as different or as not having cash.

16. Parents knew which other parents were in receipt of pupil premium, so pupils also knew who among their classmates had it, and those with it felt that they were disadvantaged.

17. Attracting and retaining teaching staff was made difficult by the academy not having a good Ofsted rating, as many teachers would not move to teach in a school with a low rating. To improve recruitment and retention rates, the academy would need to be able to demonstrate improvement by the time of its next Ofsted inspection. However, to make and demonstrate improvement rapidly was difficult. To help in the meantime, the academy would ensure that it made good use of the 'Teach First' initiative. Teachers local to Sheppey were easier to attract and retain, but maths and science teachers were in short supply. The academy also placed a high priority on looking after the welfare of its teaching staff.

18. The early help service could be strengthened by the service having an office at the academy, as could other services such as CAMHS. The academy was seeking to integrate these services as far as possible and this integration would shortly be proposed to the County Council. The academy sought to avoid the use of pupil referral units and keep pupils at the academy and work with them there. Once a pupil had gone to a pupil referral unit it could be hard to get them back into mainstream school.

19. Asked what would be his three priorities with which the County Council could help, Mr Ward listed the following:

- attendance – he would seek extra support and collaboration with the KCC to address attendance rates,
- an early help centre at the academy, with close working and integrated services, and
- a coach to take pupils on outings, as it currently cost the academy £500 each time it wanted to book a coach to take pupils out of school. This did not include any other costs related to the journey, for example, an admission fee for whatever they were going to visit.

20. Asked what percentage of children never had the opportunity to leave the island, Mr Ward estimated that this was about 25% of the academy's roll. Because the island had limited train services and erratic bus services, and many families had insufficient income to afford a car, most could not aspire to visit London, and even a visit to Maidstone seemed a major undertaking. Sheppey did have a very strong sense of community, and this was its biggest strength. However, children still needed much encouragement to raise their educational and employment aspirations.

21. Mr Ward was asked about his suggestions and aspirations for the future of pupil premium. He said he would like to see it properly ring-fenced so its use could be more closely controlled. The DfE needed to look at tightening up on what PP could be spent on. It was known that some schools did not spend it well and used it to bolster staff salaries and to compensate for deficits in other areas of school funding. It was noted that County Council-run schools were not permitted to be in deficit. Mr Ward added that to have a Deputy Head Teacher for pupil premium would help to ensure that it was being properly spent. However, that post would need to be funded from pupil premium.

22. Select Committee Members commented that, to get a clear and full picture of the use of pupil premium, they would need to be able to identify which schools were using it well and which ones not so well and if it were possible to identify any pattern of good or bad use amongst certain types of school.

23. The Chairman thanked Mr Ward for giving his time to attend as a substitute at short notice and help the Select Committee with its information gathering.

21. Paul Luxmoore, CEO, Coastal Academies Trust
(Item 2)

1. Mrs Game declared that her granddaughter attended Hartsdown Academy and that she had recently met with the head teacher of that school.

2. Mr Luxmoore explained that he was Executive Headteacher of the Coastal Academies Trust which consisted of 4 schools in Thanet: Cliftonville Primary School; Dane Court Grammar School; King Ethelbert School and Hartsdown Academy. Royal Harbour Academy was an associate member of the Trust pending conversion to academy status and was regarded by the Department for Education as being a full member.

3. Mr Luxmoore stressed the importance of Head Teachers working as a team to help reduce isolation, share responsibilities and work together, he considered that multi-academy trusts allowed for this to happen.

4. Mr Luxmoore reported that Cliftonville West was the most deprived area of Thanet with a significant Eastern European population. Cliftonville Primary School was outstanding and had a huge positive impact on Pupil Premium (PP) students; there was no gap between PP students and their peers. It was considered important to have an early impact in primary schools and this was being achieved at Cliftonville Primary.

5. Mr Luxmoore considered that the current PP scheme did not work because for a few hundred pounds teachers and schools were expected to overcome the effects of poverty on education and disadvantage within schools.

Mr Luxmoore explained that there was a need to provide an economic strategy, ownership and a reason to aspire within the relevant community. He resented schools being punished for not closing the gap between PP students and their peers. Mr Luxmoore was also un-convinced that family income was the best gauge for assessing whether students needed additional support. There was an assumption that if parents had low income they had low parenting skills and Mr Luxmoore considered this to be untrue and offensive.

6. Members commented that Mr Luxmoore's views were refreshing. In response to questions Mr Luxmoore confirmed that children's attainment was measured throughout primary school and at the end of primary school, there was a correlation with low attainment and Special Educational Needs (SEN). Mr Luxmoore considered that rather than basing PP on family income it could be based on attainment measured in the reception year at primary schools to determine where children were in terms of their development. This was current practice to ensure that schools were able to measure progress through to year 6.

7. Mr Luxmoore explained that PP money wasn't 'new' money for schools and was often spent on running the entire school not spent solely on disadvantaged pupils. Members asked how PP money was being spent across schools in the Coastal Academies Trust. Mr Luxmoore explained that in most Secondary schools money was spent subsidising the running of schools, schools already targeted their spending to tackle low attainment. It was considered that schools with low attaining students were more expensive to run than schools with high attaining students for reasons such as class sizes.

8. In response to a question about attendance Mr Luxmoore explained that there was a correlation between attendance and disadvantage. Dane Court Grammar School had a 95% attendance rate and Royal Harbour Academy and Hartsdown Academy had 90%. Schools had got better at breaking down attendance statistics to look at groups; some ethnic groups often had poorer attendance.

9. In most Secondary Schools, the attainment gap closed when overall results were less successful, and widened when overall results were better. Teachers would focus on PP students, ensuring that they knew who they were, had their work marked quickly and received feedback.

10. Members asked where there was evidence that PP money was being used to benefit students. Mr Luxmoore confirmed that schools had to account for the spending of PP money; however it was not being spent solely on PP students. Best practice demonstrated an awareness of who PP students were and challenged them to make better progress than they would otherwise. Mr Luxmoore commented that best practice didn't always cost money.

11. One member commented that low income parents did not necessarily have poor parenting skills but they were more limited in what they could offer their children. On the Isle of Sheppey it was thought that one quarter of pupils rarely visited areas outside of Sheppey therefore their life experiences were limited.

12. Members asked what difference it would make if the PP funding was based on low attainment rather than low income? Mr Luxmoore explained that if PP was based on attainment selective children wouldn't receive support because their attainment would be higher; in addition Mr Luxmoore considered that it would make the distribution of PP funding more accurate. Schools were already measuring attainment so this could be used to focus funding on low attainment.

13. Members asked what else KCC could do? Mr Luxmoore considered that aspiration was important, for families to aspire to a good education. It was considered that Thanet was often compared to London but families in London had greater aspirations than those in Thanet and there was no measure for aspiration. It was very difficult to raise aspirations without giving people a reason to aspire.

14. Mr Luxmoore considered that there needed to be better ways of measuring the effectiveness of schools. Members briefly discussed the National Funding Formula, the concept was to target more funding to deprived areas and the view was that no schools would lose money.

15. It was considered that there was a significant number of children who didn't qualify for PP and were therefore missing out, however in secondary schools it was thought that no child who needed extra support wasn't getting it because PP was based on low income. Mr Luxmoore considered that PP funding should not be ring-fenced.

16. Members asked whether PP money was used to fund activities which were less academic, vocational courses such as car maintenance. Mr Luxmoore gave the example of Thanet Skills Studio, it was expensive for schools to send students to the Studio so the numbers of students accessing vocational courses had reduced. The changing nature of vocational skills courses and funding had also reduced the use of the Studio.

17. Mr Luxmoore explained that there was no consensus about what worked and didn't work in relation to PP. It was important to know who the PP children were, to ensure that their progress was being tracked and to ensure that no excuses were made for underachievement based on income.

The Chairman thanked Mr Luxmoore for attending the Select Committee and for answering Members' questions.

22. Appendix *(Item 3)*