

## North Yorkshire County Council

24 February 2016

### Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### Chairman's Statement

1. The Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 13 November 2015 and looked at the issue of school leadership and governance in closing the gap in educational achievement within North Yorkshire in detail.
2. The Committee considered evidence, written and oral, from a number of sources including representatives from School Governors, Head Teachers, the Council's Children's and Young People Service, Teaching School Alliances, York University and Joseph Rowntree Trust as well as an up to date presentation on North Yorkshire 2015 educational outcomes.
3. After considering all the evidence, the Committee welcomed the Council's Closing the Gap Strategy and endorsed its general approach. It was heartening to hear from the witnesses of the level of trust between the County Council's School Improvement Service and the schools, as well as, the support for the vision in the strategy and the change to the new school led approach.
4. It was similarly really good to see the 2015 figures showing that the attainment of all disadvantaged pupils has improved at all key stages and that the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils had narrowed in North Yorkshire secondary schools for KS4 and post-16 (2014).
5. The committee felt that the following points from the strategy were particularly important for schools to follow:
  - high quality teaching and learning as the first most important principle
  - the need for a few successful interventions consistently applied and which did not overwhelm a school or confuse
  - the need to appoint pupil premium champions of both staff and governing bodies to interlink with children and parents
  - that the strategy's principle 7 (we will focus on high quality transitions) includes the need for good links between primary and secondary schools so that there is continuity and the right approach is followed in developing the child's education plan.
6. It was also good to see the clear link between areas of deprivation and the educational outcomes in those areas articulated in the strategy and that specific strategies have been developed to address those particular areas i.e. the coast.
7. Added to this, were the key points from the evidence which the committee thought could help in making the significant progress in closing the gap that we all seek.

8. These points were:

- A. Good School Leadership and Governing Body input are vital so the level of training and support provided by the Council needs to be of a high quality. The commitment to continue this is not explicitly mentioned within the principles or priorities of the strategy.
- B. We would concur with priority E (set challenging targets at all levels) and noted the comment of Dr Rudd from York University who felt that the target for KS4 could be more positive, perhaps delivered through a step change, firstly to get to the national target and then to achieve beyond this.
- C. A number of witnesses talked of the need to consider the overall social and emotional development of the child. Whilst we appreciate that this can be difficult to monitor this development, the effect of the Wolf review reforms will see school performance being judged on pupil grades across eight subjects from 2016. The evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation stated that “Well-evaluated programmes in primary and secondary schools which sought to improve the skills of all students, including self-esteem, social skills, problem solving and coping skills, led to benefits for students’ social and emotional competencies and educational outcomes.” We would anticipate that priority 4 of the strategy would cover this but you may wish to add this emphasis to that priority.
- D. Pupil transience is an issue for some of the schools in the County and is not currently highlighted in the priorities. It can be up to a third of the pupils in a year for some schools making it difficult to provide a quality baseline assessment that can lead onto the right educational plan being developed for the child.
- E. As the officer presentation stated, pupils with lower attendance are less likely to attain and with Free Schools Meals and Special Educational Needs attendance lower than national figures, we would ask that the message of keeping school attendance high, particularly for the most vulnerable students and families, remains in place.
- F. The size of the schools in North Yorkshire presented itself in a number of ways. As the Peer Review detailed and as we heard it can be difficult for small schools to recruit high quality teachers, particularly in rural areas; it can provide challenges for them to fully engage with the improvement partnerships and to receive appropriate advice and support; small cohorts can have a disproportionate effect on a schools performance along with the financial viability and the schools ability to attract the right mix and calibre of governors.

The demographic changes of increasing birth rates in some areas and issues such as transience (for instance, children whose parents or guardians are in the Forces) are a concern. A number of schools are reporting that they are reaching their capacity in terms of the numbers of children for whom they can cater. Added to this, we heard comments that the new homes build program is putting pressure on both primary and secondary schools.

We felt that there was not enough focus on the effect of small schools in the strategy or identification of possible solutions. It may well be something that is being worked on alongside the strategy but the performance of small schools particularly in areas of high deprivation can have a sizeable effect of the overall performance across the county.

G. Following on from this, clear communication from the council around how the new improvement partnership structure will develop and what as a result was expected from all the schools and partners which should include denominational boards of education is critical. We did hear of some possible lack of understanding from the witnesses on how they fitted into the new structure and what was required from them.

H. This also included access to appropriate good practice advice for a school. There was some discussion with officers prior to the committee meeting around the pupil premium good practice guides produced by Milton Keynes Council and Sheffield City Council.

It would be good if the council could provide a similar guide that highlighted how pupil premium had been spent to improve pupil educational achievement and close the gap. The guide could provide examples from the different type of schools across the county whether that is by type, location or size with a contact person from that school available to talk to other schools about the approach they had taken. This would help particularly those smaller, more isolated schools who could think here is a similar school to us and this approach has worked for them and we could give them a call to work out how it will help our school.

9. The Committee agreed that it would like to ask the School Improvement Service to come back to the Committee on 24 March 2017 to advise on the data on the 2016 educational outcomes across the county, the progress on closing the gap and an assessment/evaluation of the effect on the new improvement partnerships.
10. The Committee, at the meeting on 13 November 2015, also considered an update on a number of success indicators that had been proposed by the Task and Finish group that had looked at Online Safety.
11. The Committee noted that a campaign plan had been developed by the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board e-safety task group to deliver a campaign in North Yorkshire which assisted parents to have conversations with their children about how to stay safe online and promoted online safety to children aged 8-12 years.
12. The Committee welcomed the successful campaign work and that all the activity had now been mainstreamed. However, a number of success indicators from the Committee's task and finish group had looked for improvements being shown in the Growing up in North Yorkshire survey and would like to see the results from the 2016 survey when it had been analysed.

13. The Committee also considered the report and recommendations from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Young People Task and Finish Group. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Val Arnold, reported that the work that the Task and Finish Group had undertaken had been eye-opening and shocking at times. There was a significant difference in North Yorkshire between the experiences of an average Year 10 pupil and LGBT young people growing up. This ranged from increased bullying, poor emotional health and wellbeing and greater engagement in risky behaviours.
14. The Task and Finish Group had met local LGBT groups in North Yorkshire and listened to some of the stories and experiences LGBT people had when growing up and progressing through school. The findings and recommendations in the report were intended to guide the County Council and its partners on how to raise awareness of the issues faced by LGBT young people. They were also meant to help guide schools to take a more proactive approach in reducing homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying.
15. Members thanked Councillor Arnold and noted that this was a very important piece of work that had been undertaken and for those Members on the working group it had been thought provoking and engaging. The Committee agreed that the report and recommendations should be sent to the Council's Executive for its consideration.
16. I can confirm that the next Committee meeting that was originally scheduled for 29 January 2016 has been cancelled and replaced by a workshop on Monday 15 February 2016 at Northallerton College from 10 am to 1pm.
17. The purpose of the workshop is to understand the work that has been done by the Council's Voice, Influence and Participation team to develop opportunities, at an individual and group level to genuinely engage and listen to the voice of young people and to look at (alongside children and young people representatives) what further opportunities for engagement there are.
18. I will report on the outcomes from the workshop at the next Council meeting on 18 May 2016.

**County Councillor Janet Jefferson**

**Chairman**

Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall, Northallerton

28 January 2016