

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Report: Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Education and Children's Services
Subject: Educational Standards
Committee: Scrutiny Commission
Date: 17th October, 2002
3/OSC/E&CS
Part: I

E X 6 1 0 2 / 0 3

Executive Summary: The purpose of this report is to submit recommendations to the Executive Committee following meetings of the scrutiny panel responsible for reviewing the City's educational standards.

Corporate Strategy: The establishment of Scrutiny and Overview Panels forms part of the corporate strategy for implementation of that part of the modernisation agenda relative to new democratic arrangements.

Financial Implications: Not quantified at this stage.

Other Implications: Social inclusion and equal opportunities to ensure there is no obstruction to any child from accessing nursery education.

Recommendations It is recommended that -

the social factors which are contributing to low skills, such as lack of pre-nursery stimulation and adult interaction, be investigated and given attention;

the reasons for the high percentage of 3-4 year old children not attending any nursery provision be investigated;

the importance of good quality nursery provision over all sectors and in all locations of the city be recognised and shortfalls addressed;

the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Education and Children's Services, together with the Officers of the Local Education Authority, be requested to explore avenues of additional funding to improve nursery provision in the City.

more information be collected on -

(a) the funding shortfall;

- (b) assessment of where and why the need exists;
 - (c) the possibility that the 14% shortfall in accessing early education places might be social deprivation-based;
 - (d) the number of available places;
- (6) following ratification, progress of implementation of new procedure be reported by the lead Portfolio Member to this Scrutiny Panel within a period of six months from the date of full Council on 25th November, 2002.

Background papers:

- (i) Summary of School/College examination and national assessment - report to Executive Committee on 16th October 2001.
Summary of Education Development Plan including outline of Activity 1EYi, 1EYii and 1EYiii.
Notional allocation of 2002/03 schools budget (including Schools Support Grant) over ages/Keg stages (per Section 52 Statement).
- (iv) Statistics relating to Key Stage 1 including Level 3+.
- (v) Fixed Term Exclusion Data for the periods 1999/2000 - 2001/2002 (as at 16.7.02).
- (vi) Funding including the Co-ordination of External Funding.
- (vii) Comparative figure per pupil spending against national and statistical neighbour benchmarks.
- (viii) Additional Educational Need - Analysis of Funding 2002/2003.
- (ix) List of those schools who have not attended Ofsted Self-Evaluation.
- (x) List providing underlying factors which affect KS1 results.
- (xi) The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership including targets and statistics.
Chief Education Officer's Statement to the Ofsted Inspection Team.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| DECISION | RECORD OF DECLARATION OF INTEREST |
| REASONS FOR DECISION | |
| ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED | RECORD OF ANY DISPENSATIONS |
| REASONS FOR REJECTION OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS | RECORD OF PAPERS CONSIDERED |

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

1.0 Introduction

The Scrutiny Commission agreed a work programme for Overview and Scrutiny Panels at its meeting on 27th June, 2002. It was agreed that the topic to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Education and Children's Services would be Educational Standards.

2.0 Panel Structure

Councillors

Councillor Mrs Jones, in the Chair.
Councillor Camp, Vice Chairman.
Councillors Mrs Ford, Jordan, Mrs. Nicholson and Mrs. Pascoe.

Co-opted Members

Mr. G. Edwards.
Mr. K. Willis.

Witnesses

Anita Edwards, N.C.H. Nomony Centre.
April Pye, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, Local Education Authority.
Meryl Wilson, Early Years Consultant, Local Education Authority.

Lead Officers

Barbara Booth, Head of Schools Organisation and Services.
Paul Davies, Head of Strategic Services.
Bronwen Lacey, Acting Director for Lifelong Learning.

Panel Administrator - Rachel Watson, Legal and Democratic Services Department.

Objectives

- 3.1 Attainment figures for children in Plymouth have consistently showed under-performance at Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and spelling and the reasons why need to be investigated, with particular attention being given to the early learning years at Key Stage 0.
- 3.2 The goal is to raise the attainment outcomes of children in Plymouth so that they are higher than the national benchmark.

Hearings

The Panel met on three occasions, 5th July, 19th July and 2nd August, to consider background papers, hear from witnesses and formulate a report of recommendations to the Scrutiny Commission on 17th October, 2002.

The Panel's Findings

- 5.1 The statistics relating to Key Stage 1, including Level 3+, provide a comparison with national results and those of Portsmouth, a city which is nearest in profile to Plymouth. Attainments are rising for Plymouth, but so they are nationally and the gap at Key Stage 1 in writing, reading and spelling is not closing. It is difficult to analyse the contributory reasons as the factors are complex, but attainment of children on entry to school is lower than might be expected. There has been a change in Government requirements, with a move towards more educationally-based provision, and Early Learning Goals now apply to all providers in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors. Plymouth's nursery places are, in the main, provided by the private and voluntary sector rather than by schools. The Local Education Authority has strong links with the Early Years Partnership and, in particular, government funding is being provided for neighbourhood nurseries, e.g. Sure Start projects at N. Prospect and Ham Drive.

Many schools have difficulty in accommodating nursery units because the buildings physically cannot provide the accommodation. The Schools Organisation Plan seeks to provide more nursery units. The Area Reviews are in the process of addressing the Planned Admission Number issue, with its funding implication and ripple effect caused by adjustments to year groups to meet the optimum figure of 30.

The figure of £42 relating to Plymouth's cost of statutory/regulatory duties per pupil is low when compared to the DfES target figure of £70 and is a benchmark which represents very good value in terms of cost. The decision was taken in 1997/98 that no curriculum advisers were to be appointed, the reason being that the Devon County Council advice service was then still substantial and Plymouth's schools often did purchase advice from DCC. Plymouth now has a small team of generic advisers and, whilst they do not have individual expertise, they do know where to access good practice. This is working well. Ofsted will make the judgement as to whether this represents good value for money and will query the quality of service provided when making their inspection. Plymouth's figures relating to 'amount per pupil', both for Primary and Secondary education, shows slippage against the Unitary Average figures, but it is difficult to know what is included in these figures and whether other Authorities are able to access other resources.

- 5.4 In Plymouth many pre-school places are in the non-maintained sector and 120 providers do not employ qualified teachers. One of the targets of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership is to provide all settings, which deliver a Foundation Stage curriculum, with access to qualified practitioners. It is hoped that the Plymouth Standard, recently launched, will prove to be a useful tool to engender quality provision across this sector and there is a need for good press coverage of this document.

5.5 There is evidence that children have fewer basic social skills than was previously the case, e.g. speech and language skills are lower and more children are not toilet-trained at 3 years of age. Across all cultural groups, social factors are contributing to significant developmental delays in the youngest children and problems include:-

- reliance on television and videos and lack of quality time spent with children, resulting in reduced social interaction with adults;
- little concept of 'growing up' because children are living in this more isolated world;
- little concept of sitting and listening;
- poor speech development.

5.6 There are early education places available for 86% of Plymouth's three and four year old children with the remaining 14% not attending any recognised group. There is a need to -

- inform parents of the choices available;
- recognise that research is needed to ascertain whether the 14% of children not accessing early education places contributes significantly to the shortfall figure of 3% in attainment at Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and spelling;
develop the use of periodical audits to investigate the reasons why children do not take up nursery places;
- recognise the need for a baseline assessment.

5.7 There is a noticeable and, for such an urban situation, unusual difference in maintained and non-maintained places provided by Plymouth compared with Portsmouth, with 65% of places provided by the non-maintained sector in Plymouth and 30% provided by the non-maintained sector in Portsmouth. There is a need to assess which sector provides the best standard, though it is recognised that this is a very difficult and complex matter to measure, requiring value-added information.

5.8 There is a need to assess whether nurseries are in the right locations. Overall, there is a greater density of provision of nursery classes in the west of the City. In the east, there are few nursery places but considerable child-minding provision. A diversity of choice is needed.

Plymouth is a low wage economy. Free school meals is the proxy indicator used as that is a factor which drives money into schools for additional educational need. There is still a shortfall in achieving the Authority's aspiration for funding in respect of Additional Education Needs, which has been identified at £4m above SSA. There is a need for better proxy indicators.

Panel's Recommended Action

6.1 The social factors which are contributing to low skills such as lack of pre-nursery stimulation and adult interaction need to be investigated and given attention.

- 6.2 The reasons for the high percentage of 3-4 year old children not attending any nursery provision need to be investigated.
- 6.3 The importance of good quality nursery provision over all sectors and in all locations of the city must be recognised and shortfalls addressed.
- 6.4 More funding for improved nursery provision in the City is required and the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Education and Children's Services, together with the Officers of the Local Education Authority, should be requested to explore avenues of funding and assess where standards are in most need of development.
- 6.5 The collection of more information is required in the following areas -
- the funding shortfall;
 - targeting of funding at known need;
 - assessment of where and why need exists;
 - the possibility that the 14% shortfall in accessing early education places might be social deprivation-based;
 - number of available places.

7.0 Implementation and Monitoring

The Panel has made recommendations which it hopes will be implemented. Once ratified, the Panel request that the lead Portfolio Holder reports back to this Scrutiny Panel on the progress of any new system which is put in place within a period of 6 months.

8.0 Summary

8. The Scrutiny Panel has identified causes and recommended action which it believes will assist with improving educational attainments. It requests that the Portfolio Holder considers the issues raised and takes appropriate and positive action to address the continuing shortfall of 3% in attainment in reading, writing and spelling at Key Stage 1.
- 8.2 The Panel has identified that there are a number of factors which need to be highlighted, as follows -
- current social factors which are contributing to the problem of children not having the necessary skills when starting nursery school;
 - today's culture of electronic babysitters and lack of stimulation provided by adults;
 - 14% of 3-4 year old children are not attending any nursery provision and there is a need to gather evidence to assess whether low and under-achieving children are in this group;
 - the lack of social and group interaction is having a major effect;
 - poor parenting and a poor start in early years has an effect on later years and the trend in modern-day social factors can be seen across all cultural groups;

- there is a £60 shortfall in funding per pupil compared to Portsmouth and this is leading to a shortfall in resources in schools and a reduction in LEA staff;

8.3 The Panel would strongly encourage the collection of more information to provide the necessary evidence to support effective action.

9.0 Chairman's Summary

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, would like to -

- (a) confirm that the topic of Educational Standards has been considered with conscientious and serious application;
- (b) thank all the officers and witnesses concerned for their contributions to this Scrutiny Panel.