

SCHOOL STANDARDS TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

5th November, 2009

PRESENT – Councillor Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Armstrong, Hughes and Long.

CO-OPTTEES – Mr. R. Egan and Mr. M. Frank.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Richmond, Ms. S. Bamber, Mr. Fisher and Mr. G. McQueen.

OFFICERS – Andy Dunn, Assistant Director : School Improvement and Development, Nigel Pell-Ilderton, Quality Assurance and Standards (School Improvement and Karen Graves, Democratic Support Officer.

The Chair welcomed and introduced everyone to the meeting and advised that the main focus of this meeting was to investigate the current standards within schools. Andy Dunn and Nigel Pell-Ilderton circulated various data and statistical information which Members gave consideration to and the following points were discussed and considered :-

- The role of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) which had expanded and improved recently. Each school in the Borough had a SIP who undertakes regular visits and makes recommendations to aid school improvement. A SIP was not necessarily a member of Darlington Borough Council staff and could possibly be a Head teacher from another Local Authority. Nigel Pell-Ilderton, currently the SIP Manager, held training, talked to and held regular meetings with SIPs in order to review collated data and enquire what was being done to address any problems.
- The Group were advised that depending on the amount of children on the roll at a particular school one child could make a large difference to the statistics, for example, if one child counted as one per cent and another child counted as 16 per cent the outcome figures would be totally different. Generally boys performed best in maths and science with girls favouring English and reading.
- It was also stated that the submitted data was for a group of children that had moved on, i.e. Y6, however, it was important to explore the reasons for any poor performance i.e. supply teaching, maternity cover and manage that problem accordingly. SIPs were always encouraged to ask ‘What is being done now?’ to address any problems.
- It was also stated that fixed-term exclusions had declined as problems were being dealt with and the children taught better. Every Secondary School had a Higher Level Teaching Assistant for difficult pupils (funded by the schools) and the Group were also made aware of the Turn Around Centre based in Red Hall Primary School which opened in January 2008 and can cater for 18 children. Prior to admission every child undertakes a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) . Children attend the Turn Around Centre four mornings or afternoons for an initial period of two terms. The remainder of the day is spent at the child’s school. There is a high ratio of staff to pupils and Health Services are involved through counselling, CAMHS and Mental Health links.

- The cost of a child attending Turn Around was a minimal amount if compared to the cost of a permanently excluded child. Taxi fares for transporting the pupils to and from the Centre were also included within that amount.
- It was also stated that each five per cent loss of attendance had an impact on results and SIPs constantly ask why? And which children? i.e. high attainers, ethnic, mobile. There were currently four primary schools in the Borough which were targeted for attendance and one school had 25 per cent of pupils having English as a second language. Was information sent to parents in Polish, etc? A member stated that Longfield School actually had posters around the school detailing the attendance levels of pupils.
- SIPs have to be prepared to ask questions and normally work alongside the Heads and teachers to suggest improvements and changes. They also talk to SENCOs and Heads of English, Maths and Science and attend Governor meetings and present findings.
- Nigel Pell-Ilderton received all the SIP reports and after analysing the data asked Why? What? When? How?. Good teachers encourage better behaved children and the SIP working in close partnership with the school can contribute to better results. However it was highlighted that the national statistics did not show where a child started and that deprivation had a profound effect on a child. 24 per cent of all children in Darlington were living in poverty and this needed to be addressed along with social problems as a community. In 2008/09 Darlington was the most improved Local Authority in the Country for 5A* to C GCSE results. It was also recognised that GCSE's were not necessarily correct for all children and other options needed to be considered.
- Nigel advised the Group that the College operates a one-day week course for pupils to enable them to get on their desired course however the school has ownership of the child and the child attends school for the remaining four days.
- As this Authority does not have catchment areas it was not always the case that a child went to its nearest school and the Group were also advised that swine flu could have a dramatic effect on future attendance statistics. Authorised absences also had an effect on figures and Darlington had a large amount of travelling children on school rolls.
- It was also highlighted that schools needed to encourage and move forward higher achieving children. SIPs ask Why? And progress is now being made in this area. Children need to be encouraged to learn and the Authority would like to meet national benchmarks.
- Andy advised the Group that Darlington's Data Team had been voted the best in Country as voted by Schools and at the present time 18 schools in Durham had asked for a Data Pack.
- The Chair stated that it would be useful to hold another meeting in approximately three or four months' time and focus on a secondary school.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to Andy Dunn and Nigel Pell-Ilderton for their informative and interesting presentations.

(b) That another meeting of this Group be scheduled for three or four months time and that statistical information on a Secondary School be submitted.