



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2012
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor S Akhtar (Convener)
Councillor S Brown
Councillor J Caldwell
Councillor A Forrest
Councillor D Grant
Councillor J Gillies
Councillor J Goodfellow
Councillor W Innes
Councillor M Libberton
Councillor P MacKenzie
Councillor F McAllister
Councillor M Veitch
Mr S Bunyan
Mrs M Goldsmith

Council Officials Present:

Mr D Ledingham, Executive Director (Services for People)
Mrs K MacNeill, Corporate Legal Adviser
Ms J Mackay, Media Manager
Ms F Brown, Principal Officer (Pupil Support)
Mrs F Stewart, Committees Assistant

Clerk:

Miss F Currie, Committees Assistant

Visitors Present:

Ms Jacqui MacKinnon, Head Teacher, Prestonpans Primary School
Mr Paul Raffaelli, Head Teacher, Dunbar Grammar School
Ms Sarah Ingham, Head Teacher, Knox Academy

Apologies:

Councillor P McLennan
Mr M McHugh

Declarations of Interest:

None

The Convenor welcomed the visitors to the meeting: Jacqui MacKinnon, Head Teacher at Prestonpans Primary School; Paul Raffaelli, Head Teacher at Dunbar Grammar School, Sarah Ingham, Head Teacher at Knox Academy and two senior pupils from Knox Academy currently on work experience with the Council.

1. EXCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOLS IN EAST LoTHIAN 2011-12

The Executive Director (Services for People) presented a report providing the Committee with information about exclusions from East Lothian schools in academic session 2011-12. The Convenor invited Ms Jacqui MacKinnon, Head Teacher, Prestonpans Primary School and Mr Paul Raffaelli, Head Teacher, Dunbar Grammar School to speak to this report.

Ms MacKinnon advised Members that there were 59 individual pupils excluded from primary schools in academic session 2011-12. This is equivalent to 8 primary pupils per 1000 and represents an 11% reduction from the previous academic session and a 26% reduction over the past 3 sessions. She indicated that this was down to a number of initiatives which were now available in schools to identify potentially vulnerable pupils and to address challenging behaviour at an early stage. Staff from the school worked closely with community support workers, social workers, the police, and the pupil and parents to identify the causes of such behaviour and to draw up an action plan, the goal being to return the child to mainstream schooling as quickly as possible. Initiatives such as Place2Be and Anti-Bullying East Lothian were also proving invaluable in helping to address challenging behaviours and to give pupils back a feeling of self worth and achievement. Ms MacKinnon also pointed out that teaching staff received training and support to deal with challenging behaviour and to promote pupils' self-esteem and team working skills.

Mr Raffaelli began by advising Members that there had been no permanent exclusions from East Lothian's schools in the 2011-12 session. As with primary schools, the number of pupils excluded from secondary schools had reduced since last session and over the previous 3 sessions. He indicated that these figures reflected the more holistic approach taken by teachers and support workers: teaching was no longer a 9 am to 3.30pm profession and a child's behaviour in school could no longer be considered in isolation. Early intervention was a crucial part of the process as was multi-agency working. Pupils and families were no longer encouraged to see exclusion as a punishment but rather a breathing space in which to address the behaviour and needs of the child. As with primary schools, a number of initiatives existed within secondary schools to help support pupils, parents and teachers in these circumstances. There had been significant success stories of such challenging pupils eventually leaving school with up to 5 qualifications.

The Convenor thanked Ms MacKinnon and Mr Raffaelli for their presentations and invited questions from Members.

In response to a question from Councillor McKenzie, Mr Ledingham, Executive Director (Services for People), confirmed that the rate of exclusions among Looked After children was higher than that of other pupils and this was a concern. This was an area where early intervention was a crucial part of addressing and reversing the effects of challenging behaviours. Mr Raffaelli also indicated that there was currently a research group looking at how schools dealt with Looked After Children.

Councillor Innes agreed that the issue of Looked After and Accommodated Children required further consideration. He also raised concern over the rise in exclusions of girls from secondary schools compared to the figures for primary school. He

suggested that further investigation was required into the reasons for this behaviour shift.

Councillor Veitch welcomed the report but pointed out that schools also had an obligation to the majority of pupils, and their parents, to ensure their education was not disrupted due to the behaviour of a small minority. He highlighted the issue of multiple exclusions and asked whether there was a limit to the number of temporary exclusions for an individual pupil before a permanent exclusion would apply. Mr Ledingham indicated that there was no assumption made that a pupil would be permanently excluded and no limit at which services would give up on the child. The goal was always to keep the child in school. Both Ms MacKinnon and Mr Raffaelli concurred with this view and explained that where a pupil had multiple exclusions there would be a review of the arrangements in place to manage that child and to consider the action needed to address the ongoing problem.

Councillor Caldwell asked about early intervention and how this worked in practice. He also wanted to know about the impact which a disruptive child may have on other vulnerable children. Ms MacKinnon explained that potentially vulnerable children could be identified as early as Infant School and that strategies could be put in place to support that child and the family, including any siblings. Mr Raffaelli indicated that secondary schools worked with their primary school cluster to identify and work with potentially vulnerable pupils and families during the transition period between primary and secondary school. In relation to the impact of disruptive pupils, it was always the intention to identify and deal with challenging behaviour as quickly as possible to minimise its effect on other pupils.

Councillor McAllister felt that the statistics were impressive and that the reports from both speakers showed the amount of inspirational work taking place in schools. The Convener concluded the discussion by thanking both speakers for their input and commitment to this issue.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

2. PUPIL LIME SURVEY RESULTS 2011/12

Mr Don Ledingham, the Executive Director (Services for People), presented a report informing the Committee of the results of the 2011/12 Pupil Lime Survey held in November 2011 and trends for the last four years.

Mr Ledingham advised Members that East Lothian Council was the only Local Authority in Scotland that regularly gathered information on student opinion, including getting pupils to make a judgement about their progress. Mr Ledingham invited Sarah Ingham, Head Teacher at Knox Academy, to present the results of the 2011/12 Survey.

Ms Ingham explained that the Pupil Lime Survey built on existing Student Evaluation Software and comprised 32 measures designed to gather the views of young people on a range of matters including teaching and learning, community issues, child protection and physical/sports activities. Information sheets were provided alongside the survey to ensure pupils understood what they were being asked but without prejudicing their potential responses. A total of 1830 pupils completed the survey: 990 P6 pupils and 840 S2 pupils. This represented a completion rate of 87.8%. Ms Ingham summarised the key results of the survey noting that 23 of the 30 measures from the 2010/11 survey had shown an improvement on the previous year.

However, she indicated that the results did raise some issues, e.g. 32% of P6 pupils and 29.9% of S2 pupils said that they regularly helped to take care of someone in their family who was physically or mentally ill or had problems with drugs or alcohol. These figures were above the East Lothian average.

Ms Ingham concluded that while the overall picture was positive, the results of the survey did give a mandate to make changes within schools. It was important to ensure that the results were turned into actions. She commended the Pupil Lime Survey as an excellent tool and an invaluable source of information.

The Convenor thanked Ms Ingham for her presentation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Goodfellow asked why P6 pupils had been chosen rather than P7. Mr Ledingham explained that there required to be a separation between the two groups and P7/S1 were considered to be too close together. Also, there was evidence to suggest that a dip existed between P6 and S2 stages and there were significant gaps in their understanding as to why this was the case. Often it was down to the change in teaching style but other factors might exist. Mr Ledingham reminded Members that the Pupil Lime Survey was a free tool and that it had a significant impact on the way the Department did its job.

Councillor Goodfellow expressed concern that more P6 than S2 pupils had answered yes to the "carer" question. He queried whether they had fully understood this question. Mr Ledingham explained that this was where the information sheets were helpful and Ms Ingham confirmed that work had been done to ensure that the pupils understood what they were being asked.

Councillor Veitch agreed that the survey was a very worthwhile exercise, however, he was a little concerned that the questions in the latter part of the survey were somewhat vague. He also noted that the issue of bullying appeared to have been omitted from the survey. Mr Ledingham advised that the survey questions were drawn up in consultation with colleagues from other areas of the Council and were designed to look wider than just the classroom experience. The questions were reviewed on an annual basis to ensure their continued relevance. On the issue of bullying, there had been quite a lot of discussion on how to address this in the survey. It was agreed to ask pupils whether they felt "safe and secure" within school and to ask about pupil behaviour, rather than use the term "bullying". Ms Ingham confirmed that they intentionally avoided a direct question on bullying as such questions tended to illicit less of a response. Mr Raffaelli agreed that although schools did take bullying very seriously it had quite a broad definition and the word itself had many overtones and concerns.

Councillor Caldwell queried the figures in relation to Primary Schools and noted that, of the 32 questions, 22 appeared to be on a downward trend compared with fewer in Secondary Schools. Mr Ledingham indicated that the figures for Primary Schools were already quite high whereas the baseline for Secondary was relatively low.

Councillor McKenzie suggested that it might be useful to include a question on how well pupils feel. Mr Ledingham agreed that the mental health agenda was important and that this could be looked at during the annual review of questions. Ms Ingham indicated that this was where the role of staff was crucial in identifying changes in behaviour.

The Convenor thanked everyone for their views and concluded by reiterating the importance of turning the statistics into actions.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Note that the 2011/12 Pupil Lime Survey results represent a continuing improving trend over the four-year period between 2008/09 and 2011/12.
- ii. Authorise the Executive Director and relevant stakeholders to make use of the results to inform service planning and support the community planning process.

3. SCHOOL CLOTHING GRANTS

The Executive Director (Services for People) presented a report requesting that the Committee approve the amendments to the list of qualifying benefits families have to be in receipt of to be eligible to apply for a school clothing grant.

Ms Fiona Brown, Principal Officer (Pupil Support), explained that clothing grants were awarded to families in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance. However, a recent internal audit highlighted that Employment and Support Allowance was not actually mentioned on the application form as being one of the benefits eligible for this grant. The recommendation from Internal Audit was that this should be rectified. Ms Brown emphasised that this was simply an amendment to reflect a change in terminology and would not introduce new eligible applicants.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Approve the amendments to the list of qualifying benefits to meet the requirements set out by internal audit. It should be noted that there was not a change or increase to the number of benefits accessing clothing grants.
- ii. Note that the qualifying benefits were:
 - Income Support;
 - Income Based Job Seekers Allowance;
 - Employment and Support Allowance (income related).
- iii. Note that the Department would continue to assess any requests made by families for a clothing grant on the basis of financial hardship, ensuring that the grant continues to target families most in need.
- iv. Note the East Lothian Council Internal Audit Report entitled "Audit Report on Free School Meals and Clothing Grants", which has been lodged in the Members Library (248/12 (October 2012 Bulletin).

Signed

Councillor Shamin Akhtar
Convener of the Education Committee