

Tuesday 2 June 2015

Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted subgroup

This was a small meeting and the attendees seemed quite surprised to have an observer present. The chair (Cllr Stone) and minute-taker (whose name I missed and doesn't appear on the agenda) were notably welcoming.

Councillors: Stone; Reid; Midgeley (who left mid-way); the aforementioned minute-taker; and a new councillor who also doesn't appear on the agenda.

Co-opted members: Gladys Rhodes White– Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services; Mrs M Gadian - a Teacher Representative; and Ms C Wibier - a Parent Governor Representative

MCC have not yet published this year's committee membership. It was noted that Cllr Cox was absent.

I have highlighted in **green** issues that we may wish to look further into.

1. Minutes from previous session

2. Ofsted reports

i. King David's High School Academy

The subgroup acknowledge the impressive consistency across the school's report ('Outstanding' across the board), and favourable comparisons were drawn to the 'Good' rated academies: Manchester Health Academy and Manchester Enterprise Academy, which it was said had more mixed reviews from Ofsted (below).

The report is very positive, however it does identify potential for improvement ("Very occasionally, feedback does not direct students clearly enough..."). This was not discussed at this meeting.

It was noted that Academies are not required to report their SEN (pupils with 'Special Educational Needs') numbers in the same way as LA-controlled schools. The subgroup agreed to 'try' to get that data.

ii. Benchill Primary School

The Chair asked why the school was under management of an interim executive board and it was explained that Benchill Primary is part of a group of three schools, with Newhall Green and [another]. There was an issue with governance at Newhall Green and so all three were placed under interim management. This was not seen to be a reflection on Benchill Primary.

iii. Manchester Enterprise Academy

This report was considerably better than the previous inspection in 2013. Again, the areas of suggested improvement were not discussed.

The Parent Governor Representative raised the impact of poverty on school attainment, pointing out that the school is in a relatively poor area. However a councillor noted that the school's catchment area is relatively diverse and does include 'richer' areas, making direct poverty-attainment connections problematic.

It was noted that Manchester Airport is the school's main sponsor.

The Chair wanted to know who or what Ed Start is. The report reads:

"A small number of students who have behavioural, social or emotional needs are educated full-time at alternative provisions. These services are managed by Manchester City Council and are Ed Start and the pupil referral unit" [sic]

None of the subgroup's members knew who or what Ed Start was.

iii. Manchester Health Academy

This school was praised as a particular success. A previous Ofsted report determined that the school required improvement. A new headteacher was credited with turning the school around to achieve a 'Good' rating in just 18 months.

Edstart [sic] was again mentioned, prompting the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services to look it up on her smartphone. They are a third sector education provider "clearly working with a number of Manchester schools", she found.

iv. Sharston Sure Start Children's Centre

- Disclosure: I worked as a consultant with this centre, which included preparing for and presenting at the Ofsted inspection in question. BG

This was discussed at first in the wider context of Manchester's children's services provision, which were rated 'Inadequate' at the recent (2014) citywide inspection. Cllr Reid asserted that, "Clearly there are lessons to be learned from these reports" and explained that MCC had employed external quality assurance inspectors for Sure Starts. She accepted that MCC had been insufficiently monitoring Sure Starts and had "hoped it was working".

The Sharston inspection was conducted within a week of new management [Barnardo's] taking over and the centre is likely to be inspected again within six months. The subgroup was confident that once settled in the new staff would improve the centre.

The Chair raised a recent news announcement by the Prime Minister that planned cuts to Child Benefit would not go ahead and the Chair wondered aloud "Where the cuts will come from". A high percentage of families who use the Sharston centre rely on benefits for income.

Mrs Rhodes White raised the issue that registration was quite high at the centre but actual engagement low, "We have to get our Early Help offer right" as it is much more costly to address associated issues at later stages.

She raised the New Delivery Model which was rolled out in April 2015 and identified a remaining "need to develop links with schools and early help".

One member offered anecdotal evidence of a family who had never been in touch with a health visitor, despite obvious need. It was noted that health visitors are due to come under local authority control so MCC hope for improvements here.

There was then a wide discussion about cultural perceptions of breastfeeding.

The Teacher Representative asserted that hard to reach children and families were still “falling through the gaps.”

The Sharston report contains recommendations specific to the council:

“Data and management information provided by the local authority and used by the centre and its partners are not always sufficiently accurate or analysed in enough depth...”

“The local authority should work more effectively with Barnardo’s, centre leaders, partners and the advisory board to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the centre’s work...”

These issues were not discussed.

v. Moss Side Children’s Centre

- *Disclosure: I have previously worked for the organisation who manage this centre, which they took over from the LA after I completed my contract. BG*

Discussion of this centre was very brief. Practice here has improved since the organisation managing the centre engaged with the external Quality Assurance team.

vi. Chrysalis Manchester

This is a small child-minding service which has received successive poor reviews by Ofsted. The subgroup believe the service to be on a ‘last chance’ from Ofsted prior to closure.

The Teacher Representative asked where the children would go and it was pointed out that Moss Side Children’s Centre is very near and would have capacity to take on the small number of children that would be affected in the event of closure.

Cllr Cox was absent from this meeting, he would likely have had greater insight on this topic, the group noted.

Cllr Reid noted that she often hears private childminding providers “complain” that their funding per child is considerably less than that provided to nurseries.

3. Post Ofsted Improvement Plan Update

Mrs Rhodes White apologised for “technical language” and acronyms and dedicated some time to explaining what an MCAF is to the “lay people present” – at least one of the councillors present was very recently elected. An MCAF is a uniform multi-agency referral for families in need or at risk. - *They are also used as a measure by Ofsted to gauge how well a LA identifies at risk/in need children and young people. BG*

Mrs Rhodes White noted that performance at the Early Help stage was very low in Manchester compared to similar localities. The group discussed that it could be that families are not receiving help or that they are receiving help in other, less-formal ways, preventing cases from reaching the MCAF stage. This was a popular speculation.

The new 'Troubled Families, Complex Dependencies Model' was discussed which assigns a key-worker to families and may also contribute to low numbers of completed MCAFs as key-workers may be intervening before other services, reducing the need for an MCAF referral.

There is a new management structure in place with a remit to work more closely with Department of Health on the New Delivery Model - the team includes Julie Heslop, John Edwards and Karen Jarmany.

MCC are working with partners (statutory and non-statutory) on the question "What does an early help model look like?"

A new 'hub' model will be rolled out from 1st Sep 2015. Three hubs will initially exist: North, Central and South. It aims to organise a 'Family, Community and Neighbourhood approach' as opposed to traditional social worker interventions. "We need to make sure we're capturing all that work", said Mrs Rhodes White.

The new hub model was here discussed mostly in terms of helping MCC meet DofE and Ofsted targets.

Uncertainty around where support may come from and the perception that the lead professional will be responsible for all areas of support was identified as "the biggest deterrent to a key-worker model". The hub approach would clarify and organise that support. Each hub would have a social worker and an 'Early Help Advisor' to provide advice. The aim here being that risk is appropriately assessed and managed.

Cllr Reid suggested that the committee could liaise with Neighbourhoods Scrutiny on this hub model.

Mrs Rhodes White was keen on providing "bespoke" support. The aim being "holistic, sustainable support for whole families". The picture would be a lot better in a year's time, she suggested.

This model is being piloted in June with a view to being rolled out in September.

The Chair asked if all children are assessed for level of need. Mrs Rhodes White said that is the aim but in reality services are mainly targeting families identified as high-risk at the pre-birth stage.

Manchester has a MCAF to population ratio below the north west average and MCC hope to reconcile that. MCAFs are a measure used by Ofsted to gauge identified risk/need.

The conversation returned to informal interventions - "lollipop ladies and dinner ladies" were mentioned as likely providers of such unregulated support work.

The MCAF process is to be digitised in the future. One councillor stated that "it would be good to see the age [children] are at the point of MCAF" as there is particular importance

over the psychological development at age 3 and intervening later can be much more difficult.

Many new appointments are being made in Children's Services and Mrs Rhodes White was pleased with the "aspiration" of some internal candidates, though none have been successful. Many MCC staff have potential to become leaders but "don't know what Good looks like" and this is partly down to lack of positive "role models", she said.

Mrs Rhodes White is currently making an effort to "sell Manchester" as a place "on the up" to external candidates in relevant media including trade journals and the MEN. This was favourable as external people were likely to bring "new ideas, energy and commitment" lacking in MCC staff, she said.

Ends.

These meetings were monthly but are now to be held quarterly.

Mrs Rhodes White has been asked to stay on for another year and she has agreed.
- Note: it might be worth looking into how she is paid, if she is paid a consultant's day-rate as opposed to salary, the city might not be getting good value for money.
BG

I have done my best to give a complete and accurate record of the meeting, whilst identifying areas where we may wish to learn more. This is my honest interpretation of events and details may not necessarily be completely accurate.

Ben Godfrey
2nd June 2015