

Members of the Young People & Education Improvement Committee

Elected Members

Cllr Andrew Thornton (Chair)
Cllr Angela Sinfield (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Rupert Oliver
Cllr Matt Palmer
Cllr Zameer Shah
Cllr Carol Beardmore

Co-opted Members

John Anderson – Church Representative
Claire Parr – Church Representative
Nigel Aston – Parent Governor Representative
Mike Pollard – Parent Governor Representative
Stuart Davies – Teachers Secondary School Representative
Paul Skelton – Teachers Special School Representative
Wasim Ahmed – Bradford & Keighley Youth Parliament (BKYP) Representative
Hina Rasheed – Bradford & Keighley Youth Parliament (BKYP) Representative

Advisor to the Committee

Professor Ivan Reid - Professor of Sociology of Education and Director of the Unit for Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of Bradford

Portfolio holder

Cllr Colin Gill – Children’s Services and Education Portfolio Holder

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Chair's Foreword

The road leading to this final report on Primary Education has been a long and sometimes tortuous one. Whilst the terms of reference were specific, the scope of the Committee's investigation was extensive, if not exhaustive.

There are no easy answers as to how we will improve both the quality of provision and standards of attainment in Bradford's primary schools. If there were, it would have been done by now. It is now time to grasp the nettles that must and should have been dealt with. If the committee's report is uncomfortable reading for some, so be it. Nothing is more important than the start in life that we give our children.

The bedrock of the committee's recommendations is that strong and effective leadership and management is fundamental to success. This cuts right across the board – in schools with head teachers and governors, as well as in the support given to schools by the council and Education Bradford. Without this, our ambitions will not be achieved.

The committee has based its recommendations on evidence and informed reasoning rather than conjecture. As a result, we have hopefully laid to rest many ill-founded assumptions.

Since we started our scrutiny, much has changed. Improvements are being made in several of the areas that we identified and recommendations in our interim report are being implemented.

It is important that we realise, that this is not the end of the road, but the beginning. The committee has identified the areas it regards as important and made recommendations for change. It must now carry its findings forward and monitor progress made.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to the committee members, officers of the council and Education Bradford, the schools, organisations and individuals that have contributed to our investigation, and our conclusions.

Councillor Andrew Thornton

Chair, Young People & Education Improvement Committee

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background

In December 2006, the Young People and Education Improvement Committee agreed to undertake an enquiry into primary school education within the Bradford District. The Terms of Reference for the scrutiny were agreed by the Committee on 20 December 2006, and are attached at Appendix 1.

The Scrutiny Process

This scrutiny has been carried out in accordance with the arrangements detailed in paragraph 2, Part 3E of the Constitution of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

Members have received and gathered a range of information from a number of different sources, including:

- 2 ‘public hearings’ gathering information and views from Education Bradford, Bradford Council (Education Client Team), the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and Education, Teacher Unions and the Early Years and Childcare Service;
- Site visits primary schools in the Bradford District;
- Feedback from a questionnaire issued to all primary school head teachers;
- Feedback from an online questionnaire aimed at parents, pupils, governors and teachers;
- Information arising from the Beacon Scheme event for school improvement;
- A visit to a Beacon authority in July 2007.

In January 2007, Professor Ivan Reid was appointed as a ‘critical friend’ to the Committee.

The primary objectives of the Committee were to:

Determine what the current situation was and how this compared to the national picture.

Examine why the standards had not improved. (Were there factors that were particular to the Bradford District? How do we compare with other Local Authorities?)

Examine what is being done to ensure that the standards improve. (What were the relevant current policies, procedures and practices that are in place, how successful they have been and how they will make an additional impact in the future?)

Investigate good practice at schools in Bradford District and elsewhere in the country that have increased the standards of attainment and pupil progress. (Especially in the Communication, Language and Literacy strand).

Seek to determine means to drive up the quality of primary education across the District

Chapter 2 – Findings and Recommendations

This report presents the findings and conclusions the Committee has made as a result of its research. It also makes a number of recommendations for action by the Council / Education Bradford. The review of Primary Education is now over, but it is important that a programme of monitoring and evaluation of all recommendations contained within this report is undertaken.

Main Findings / Recommendations

It is clear that the ingredients needed to create an environment where pupils' achievements and attainment are maximised are multi faceted: However there are a number of common features that are present in 'well performing' schools. These include:

- Strong leadership and management from the governing body, head teacher and senior management team;
- A clear management structure that sets out responsibilities and lines of accountability;
- High levels of constructive parental support and involvement;
- A clear focus on target setting and tracking pupil performance that is used to drive improvement.
- A rigorous and unrelenting emphasis on maximising attendance.
- A clear vision for the school, and what it wants to achieve.
- A culture of high expectations of pupils, parents, staff and governors.
- A school ethos that regards achievement of the national benchmark at Key Stage 2 as though it were an 'entitlement' for every child.
- A friendly and supportive environment allowing children to thrive and be happy

Emerging Areas for Improvement

There are a number of areas that the Committee has identified where improvements can be made:

Strategy for Improvement

The Committee recognises that the pressure on schools and Education Bradford (EB) to improve educational performance is intense. There is, however, a strong desire to improve amongst all involved. This needs to be harnessed and directed towards collaborative programmes of work.

Evidence indicates that the Intensive Support Programme (ISP) has had excellent results elsewhere in the UK; far better than it initially had in Bradford. There is a need to fully understand the reasons for this and then to use the ISP appropriately in Bradford schools where it would be of benefit. This has now started to happen. It is equally important to ensure that the ISP is seen as one of the tools for improvement and not the only tool for improvement.

Overall, the desire and willingness to improve is welcomed by the Committee; however, we are of the view that there is a need for the Council and Education Bradford to strengthen its approach to school improvement and agree on an overall strategy. This strategy should clearly set out agreed plans for school improvement for all stakeholders to share and be part of.

It is also important that the strategy identifies and addresses any contractual issues that may currently be a barrier to improvement. The capacity to produce and then deliver on an agreed strategy will be a true test of 'partnership working'.

Furthermore, the Committee encountered some difficulties in collating data on schools, as there did not appear to be a single data point / contact, with various different data sets held at different locations/sections. This did not give the Committee confidence that the range of data available was being considered in a comprehensive manner: Effort is needed to improve data availability in order to support the overall Strategy for Improvement, which in itself needs to consider the collection, use and interpretation of school related data.

Notwithstanding resource issues identified elsewhere in this report, it should be recognised that resources for many of the identified issues/ recommendations may fall to be funded from outside the education DSG budget: As such, it will be important to fully consider any resource implications arising from this report and prioritise actions accordingly.

Recommendation 1

The Intensive Support Programme (ISP) should be implemented where appropriate. Any additional resources in relation to this must be clearly linked to, and where appropriate conditional upon, agreed improvements in outcomes, rather than expanded services.

The Committee recognised the importance of the ISP, but acknowledged that there were several other programmes also dealing with the issue of improvement.

Evidence from the school visits indicated that many of the different initiatives appeared to be handled by different parts of Education Bradford, which led to delays and confusion. Schools felt that there should be co-ordination of these initiatives.

Recommendation 2

That Education Bradford creates a single point of contact for schools with regard to the various initiatives and programmes to support and drive school improvement.

Leadership

Strong leadership and management from the head teacher, senior management team and a school's governing body is a cornerstone of success and the capacity to improve.

The Council and Education Bradford must act to foster and develop strong and effective leadership and management teams in schools, providing high levels of support where necessary. It must also be prepared to act quickly and decisively to address persistently weak performance and inadequate capacity to improve.

School governors and the governor service also have a critical role here: The above comments apply equally to governing bodies as to a school's senior management team. Individual governors and governing bodies need to be clear what their role is in relation to school improvement.

Concerns have been expressed as to the impact of a school's size on senior management arrangements and their capacity, especially if the school gets into difficulties. In such, instances, the level of support needed for a small school may well be greater than that required for a larger school.

Evidence from the hearings indicated that staffing situations in schools, particularly in relation to Human Resource issues, were not always resolved quickly.

Where schools need Human Resource advice that support should be offered in an appropriate manner and timely fashion.

Recommendation 3

Action is needed to foster and develop strong and effective leadership and management teams in schools, providing high levels of support where necessary. The local authority must also be prepared to act quickly and decisively to address persistently weak performance and inadequate capacity to improve.

The Committee regarded communication as a key leadership issue, in particular communication between senior management and the governing body.

School Governors need to be provided with more meaningful information with regard to their school. The information should be succinct and clear, and should inform governors about the performance of their school and the challenges facing their school.

Whilst undertaking the scrutiny some members of the Committee visited the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and learned that the authority provided schools with an information pack. One element of this pack was a "Key Questions" sheet. The sheet is a list of questions that provide a useful guide for school governors when considering their school. The list is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendation 4

Education Bradford should offer guidance to head teachers to enable them to provide governors with consistent reports in the form of a standard report template. These reports should be available in advance of meetings and address the school's performance and improvement plan. This report should show governors where their school is in comparison to others.

This should be backed up by information to governors from an external source, e.g. the school improvement adviser or school improvement partner.

Pupil tracking and target setting

Understanding and developing individual pupil's strengths and areas for improvement are key roles for a school and it's teaching staff – and there are examples of effective systems across the District: However, the Committee is concerned that rigorous and robust systems of assessing pupil baselines, target setting, and tracking progress are not universally and effectively applied or embedded across the whole of the District.

A review carried out in July 2007 confirms that almost all primary schools now have some form of pupil tracking system (99%).

Overall 64% of schools were judged to have pupil tracking systems which were good or well-embedded in the school's practice. Good tracking systems were most frequently seen in schools which have well-established systems which have been developed over a number of years.

A range of tracking systems are in use by schools. However the accuracy of data contained within the system is variable. Assessment of children's progress is now good or better in 68% of schools. The majority of primary schools have now begun to hold pupil progress meetings (77%).

In over 50% of schools, the impact of pupil tracking on children's progress was judged to be good or very good.

As a priority, there is a need to ensure that all schools have appropriate systems in place to accurately monitor pupil performance and that this is being used effectively to help pupils achieve their full potential and drive up standards.

Schools use a variety of differing systems to assess, target and track progress. Where these are working well, the Council and Education Bradford should not interfere. In other circumstances, however, it may be appropriate for the Council and Education Bradford to recommend a 'standard' approach to pupil tracking and performance. Initially, targeted at those schools identified as 'causing concern', this should be supplemented by the use of an appropriate and consistent pupil tracking package, including necessary training, guidance and support.

Recommendation 5

Urgent action is needed to ensure that all schools have in place rigorous and robust systems of assessing pupil baselines, target setting, and tracking progress and that these are being used effectively to drive up standards.

Pupil Attendance

Information from the Education Bradford termly report (summer term 2007) shows that the problem of non-attendance marginally decreased from the previous year (2005/06).

Attendance at Bradford's primary schools

Year	Attendance (%)	Authorised absence (%)	Unauthorised absence (%)	Absence (%)
2006/07	94.66	4.47	0.87	5.34
2005/06	93.78	5.27	0.95	6.22

Attendance improved overall in 117 primary schools, 11 schools remained static, and in 21 schools performance declined. 83 schools met or exceeded their target, 74 did not.

Education Bradford informed the Committee that pupil level data on persistent absence is now available to the service and will be used to target support to individual pupils in both primary and secondary, including a focus on year 6/7 transition.

The Committee heard evidence from schools with established pupil tracking and target setting processes, that attributes under-attainment to non-attendance. The Committee is

confident therefore that there is, in general, a clear link between pupil attendance and attainment. Non-attendance impacts on pupil attainment, more especially so in situations of lower prior attainment.

As such, pupil attendance needs to be a matter for continuous attention by senior management in schools: However, the Committee has also heard that a number of head teachers feel isolated and not sufficiently supported when dealing with long-term, persistent and unauthorised pupil absence from school.

As a result, the Committee recommends a universal emphasis on attendance across all schools. This should be reinforced with a consistent approach to enforcement of policy that draws upon all the available powers of head teachers, governing bodies and the Council.

In situations where non-attendance is a major and continuing issue targeted intervention programmes, similar to the programmes running in the secondary phase, may be required. If 'off the shelf' programmes are inappropriate then the LA will need to design and implement its own programme(s).

Recommendation 6

It is essential for the Authority to develop and communicate clear, district-wide, policy guidance for schools on attendance. This guidance must be backed-up with high levels of support (resources and moral support) to head teachers to address poor attendance and clamp-down on unauthorised absence. There should be a consistent approach to enforcement of policy that draws upon all the available powers of head teachers, governing bodies and the Council.

Recommendation 7

That Bradford develops a primary phase persistent absence schools list. The Authority needs to be able to identify schools that have a problem, and institute measures to address the issue.

Identifying and learning from best practice

It is clear that there are pockets of extremely good and sound practices across a number of primary schools across the District and it is important that all the key stakeholders do not lose sight of this: Rather they should encourage and stimulate development and sharing of good practice and innovation, allowing it to grow and flourish right across the District. This can only serve to strengthen provision within all schools and help deliver better outcomes for all children.

As such the Committee urges the Council and Education Bradford to explore options that will help establish a clear framework to continually identify, develop and share best practice across the school network. This may, for example, include establishing particular 'centres of excellence' within the District, in a way that is perhaps not dissimilar to the Beacon Scheme that operates on a national level.

As part of the evidence gathering two members of the Committee undertook a visit to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets which was a Beacon Council for School Improvement 2007-08.

Recommendation 8

That the Authority:

- a) Identifies ways in which to share good practice throughout the Districts schools, designating beacon status for particular activities.
- b) Supports the dissemination of this information.
- c) Establish centres of excellence in each cluster of schools

Parenting, parental support and parental involvement

Strong parental support and involvement is essential to children's development and learning.

Currently, support for, and programmes of, parental involvement are not sufficiently well targeted, nor universally available. The Committee acknowledges that some schools will require more input than others, and therefore a strategy that addresses greatest need, is appropriate. However, the committee also recommends that a higher level of universal support to schools and families is needed. A greater degree of co-ordination is required in relation to various programmes running.

This parental involvement should be a major strand of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Recommendation 9

The Authority should provide an advice, information and guidance resource that will enable schools to better support parents.

Recommendation 10

Parenting and parental involvement should be a major strand of the Sustainable community strategy.

English as an Additional Language.

It has been suggested that one of the main reasons for low attainment in some Bradford primary schools is that many pupils do not have English as their first language and that English is not spoken at home.

Evidence from other Local Authorities, particularly from the Committee's visit to Tower Hamlets, contradicts this assumption. The Committee takes the view that whilst English as an additional language presents challenges it is not the major factor. Of far greater significance is a delayed development of language, and other skills, that occurs far too widely in children across the district irrespective of, and unconnected to, the language spoken at home.

The Committee urges the Council and its partners to redouble their efforts in the crucial 0 – 5 years area. It is essential that we narrow the gap in early development if we are improve attainment in school for these pupils.

Early years/ pre-school

The committee recognises and welcomes the very diverse provision and settings for early years services (school based nursery, private provision, child minders, play groups etc.). It also recognises, however, that such diversity brings its own unique challenges.

The role of the Early Years Service in child development and the preparation for school based learning needs to be clearly communicated across this diverse network.

Developing parenting, and preparation for school and learning must be a shared goal across Children's Services, including the Council's partner organisations: Services need to be developed collaboratively, with shared goals and timescales, to ensure a smooth transition from pre-school to school.

The Committee also recognises the vital role of play in learning and children's development.

Recommendation 11

The Local Authority must ensure a sufficient provision of high quality child care and other services, such as play groups, parent child groups, across the district and encourage its take-up amongst under represented groups.

Recommendation 12

That the Council presents a report to the Young People and Education Improvement Committee detailing what plans are in place to develop and communicate its vision across the diverse early years sector, including details of how this will be monitored.

Levels of spending

Spending on education and in schools has seen year on year real term increases in funding. Evidence presented to the committee indicates real term increases both in the overall funding for education, funding devolved to primary schools and in per pupil funding.

Funding for education in Bradford is now growing at a rate greater than that in many other authorities, and compares favourably with that of other comparator authorities.

Although the committee is of the view that the levels of spending are not a significant factor in the difference in overall performance between Bradford schools and schools in other similar authorities, it is felt that the Committee needs to be assured that difference in performance between schools within the Bradford District is not distorted by specific funding allocation decisions.

Young People and Education Improvement Committee

Terms of Reference for a Scrutiny of the Primary Education Sector 20th December 2006

See Part 3E paragraphs 2.1 to 2.11 of the Constitution of the Council

1. Background

At its meeting held on the 8th November 2006, the Young People and Education Improvement Committee received the Education Bradford - Termly Performance Report (Summer Term). The committee made the following resolution in relation to this report:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That this Committee undertakes a Scrutiny into the primary education sector in the New Year with a view to engaging with school heads, governing bodies and other interested parties. The Scrutiny to consist of visits, interviews and meetings, culminating in a public Bradford debate on primary provision.
- (3) That the Terms of Reference for the above Scrutiny be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

2. Subject of Scrutiny

Primary School Education

The scrutiny will examine attainment in the primary education sector in Bradford District.

In particular, the scrutiny will seek to:

- a. Determine what the current situation is and how this compares to the national picture.
- b. Examine why the standards have not increased. (Are there factors that are particular to the Bradford District? How do we compare with other LAs?)
- c. Examine what is being done to ensure that the standards improve. (What are the relevant current policies, procedures and practices that are in place, how successful they have been and how they will make an additional impact in the future?)
- d. Investigate good practice at schools in Bradford District and elsewhere in the country that have increased the standards of attainment and pupil progress. (Especially in the Communication, Language and Literacy strand).
- e. Seek to determine means to drive up the quality of primary education across all of the district

3. Possible Interested Parties

	Organisation / body / department
	Children's Services and Education Portfolio Holder
	Strategic Director of Services to Children and Young People
	Education Client Side
	Education Bradford
	Relevant Headteachers
	Parent Governors/Chairs of Governors
	DfES
	Relevant Trade Unions
	Parents

4. Methodology

- a. Committee (or nominated sub group) to hold "hearings" ie meetings in public. Invited "Interested Parties" to give a brief presentation (with a previously submitted written submission) to be followed by questioning by the committee.
- b. Committee (or nominated sub group) to invite written evidence from selected "Interested Parties".
- c. Committee (or nominated sub group) to commission research
- d. Committee (or nominated sub group) to hold open meetings at which members of the public or interested organisations can present their views and evidence.
- e. Committee (or nominated sub group) to visit other relevant organisations to obtain evidence.

5. Indicative timetable

Date	Event	Comments
20 December 2006	Committee agrees Terms of Reference	
February/March 2007	Public Hearings – invited witnesses to give evidence	

TOWER HAMLETS – KEY QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNORS

Overall

- How well are we doing?
- Are we above the borough or national figures?
- Are we improving?
- If the results have decreased, what caused this?
- How are we getting pupils to expected levels and to higher levels?
- In what areas are we furthest behind and where do we need to target more support to raise achievement?

Subjects and groups of pupils

- Are there significant differences in performance between the main subject areas?
- How do we compare with the national results for English, Maths and Science?
- How does the performance of boys and girls compare? Is the trend different to local and national figures?
- How does the performance of pupils from each ethnic group compare? Is the trend different to local figures?

Attendance / exclusions

- Is your attendance rate above the national figure?
- Is the rate of attendance at your school improving over time?
- How many exclusions have you made and how does it compare to other schools?

Value added

- How much progress are pupils making over time?
- How are we at getting pupils from low levels to expected levels?
- How are we at getting pupils at high levels to higher levels?
- How much progress, in average points scored, are we making compared to other schools?

How can we move forward?

- What are the school strengths?
- What are the school weaknesses?
- Where performance has improved can you identify factors that may have contributed to this?
- Have there been changes in teaching practice that may have contributed to improvement?
- Are your expectations of pupils high enough?
- Could other schools/teachers benefit from your good practice?
- Is there a local school with strengths where we have a weakness – could we learn from them?

List of Written Evidence

Transcript- First Hearing – 7 February 2007

Transcript – Second Hearing – 18 April 2007

Education Bradford Termly report to the Young People & Education Improvement Committee – 10 October 2007

Hearings and Witnesses

Wednesday 7 February 2007, City Hall, Bradford:

Cllr Colin Gill, Children's Services and Education Portfolio Holder

John McLeod, Interim Chief Education Officer

Anthony Mugan, Head of Service, Education Client Team

Heather Rushton, Director for School Improvement, Education Bradford

Wednesday 18 April 2007, City Hall, Bradford:

Robin Naylor, Head of service, Early Years and Child Care Service

Judith Seddon, Foundation Stage Advisory Teacher, Early Years and Child Care Service

Jim McKelligut, Senior Director, National Strategies

Cllr Ralph Berry, Chair Bradford Early Years Partnership

Mike Powell, Education Bradford

John Gaskin, Managing Director, Education Bradford

Anthony Mugan, Head of Service, Education Client Team

Tuesday 5 June 2007, School Visit, Bradford District

Wednesday 6 June 2007, School Visit, Bradford District

Monday 18 June 2007, School Visit, Bradford District

Wednesday 11 July 2007, Informal Meeting of the Committee