

Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council – Adults and Children’s Services

Select Committee Member Visit

Service visited: North Shore Academy (Northern Education Trust)	
Date of visit: 26 April 2018	Time of visit: 10am
Details of main contact during visit	
Name: Michael Robson	
Job Title: Principal	
What did you see?	
We met with the Principal for a discussion, prior to a tour of the school which included the lunch break.	
Who did you talk to – staff / service users / family / carers?	
Following the discussion with the Principal, we had the opportunity to speak with members of staff and students, including those in the Consequences Room.	
We visited classrooms, the Personalised Learning Centre, and the Bridge. Members noted support available including 1:1 provision, and mental health counselling support.	
During the tour Michael introduced us to various members of his team. All were very enthusiastic and seemed pleased with the progress the school and its pupils were making. When not teaching, senior staff were encouraged to undertake Learning Walks with a view to assisting all teachers to remove barriers to learning and check that Teaching and Learning is strong.	
Lunchtime was supervised by staff. It appeared to be very organised and children quietly went about their business. In the dining hall there was an `Apple for the teacher` post box, where children could nominate a teacher who had been particularly helpful to them, also a `Random acts of kindness` Tree.	
We also spoke to children who had in the past been disruptive or had absenteeism issues. One young man was very pleased to share with us his newly acquired certificate for his work and a young lady explained why she previously had not attended school.	
All the children who we spoke to seemed to have ambition and felt responsible for their own futures. We saw evidence of visits into school being encouraged, including `Chill with the Bill` (Police), Fire Brigade life skills talks and Middlesbrough Football Club. Elections were held for the school council, and the school was considering a peer mentoring scheme to provide tutoring and emotional and mental health support.	
What were the key issues arising from the visit?	
Michael has only been in position since September 2017. He shared with us his vision for the school and the expectations he had for the children to prepare them for adult life and the world of work. The school had never received a Good rating from Ofsted. A Pre-Warning Notice had been received from the Department for Education in 2016 due to low levels of attainment. At the last Ofsted monitoring visit, prior to the current Principal’s arrival stated that leaders were not taking effective actions to make the school good.	
There are currently 672 children on roll. There were 110 pupils in the current Year 11, and it was projected that around 140 Year 7 pupils would be joining in September 2018. The school has undertaken Primary	

School liaison work and the PE department facilitates a lot of primary festivals and teaching of sport in the schools. The Principal feels that the best way to promote and boost numbers was to get good outcomes and a good Ofsted and improve the reputation in the community that way to become an establishment parents want to send their children to.

At the time of the visit the school had 98 students who were either Children in Care, or open to Child in Need or Child Protection plans. The school employed a full time safeguarding officer. 65% of students were disadvantaged in 2017.

There was full recognition of the vulnerable nature of the community from which many of North Shore's students came from. The school was aiming to set high standards and ensure equality of opportunity.

Work had been undertaken to improve the quality of Personal Education Plans for Children in Care, and weekly meetings were held to discuss the progress of vulnerable children (including those with repeated exclusions).

It was agreed that the issue of exclusions was currently high profile.

The school believed that there needed to be a longer term comparison of the figures – focussing on FTEs and overall attendance. The school did not want to have the current number of FTEs - if the levels remained the same in a year's time, it was stated that the school would need to review the policy, however the school reported a reduction of 30% in numbers of FTEs between Term 1 and Term 2 in 2017-18.

It was stated that 10-20 students showed a repetitive pattern of poor behaviour.

Outwood Academy Acklam had implemented the behaviour policy some years ago and was now regarded as one of the most improved schools in the region.

With regard to FTEs, we discussed incidents versus sessions. The school was stated to prefer a number of ½ day FTEs rather than a week. Although this increased the school's total figures for FTE's, the Principal's view was that, under this system, the child had an opportunity every day to come into school and review his/her behaviour rather than being absent for a full week with the potential to be in further trouble.

During the visit we noted the operation of the Consequences Boards in each classroom. This was similar to Bishopsgarth. It was reported that 4-5 children per hour in the school would be on a C4 level of consequence.

It was recognised that for students already in place implementation of the new behaviour policy, this had been a culture shock.

The Trust also ran the Grangefield Academy in the Borough. Grangefield did not operate the Consequences behaviour policy (at the current time).

We were informed that there were two Consequences Rooms; we visited one on the day as the other was closed with no students in. The Attendance Office was co-located with the Consequences Room that was visited. The room visited was light and airy and the booths were painted in purple gloss rather than matt black. There 15 booths in the room and students were set work but it was not required to be completed. The school did not consider the day to be 'failed' if the work was not completed, as there may be issues around SEND, low ability and other issues that may affect the ability to complete. Pupils who were not doing work or reading were allowed to do mindfulness colouring in order to keep them engaged.

The school works in partnership with other schools (particularly Outwood Trust) and had staff on placement within North Shore in order to support its improvement. Partnership with other schools also enabled students to serve their sanctions at another school in preference to exclusion.

North Shore had invested £125k in alternative provision for eleven pupils who would have been permanently excluded elsewhere. As of the date of the visit there had been 3 PEX during the current school year. One of these had occurred after £25k spend in alternative provision.

It was stated that the school works with local services including the local authority, including the SEN and Engagement service. An example was given in relation to a LA-suggestion that had been trialled in relation to when detentions were held during the school week, although this had not been progressed.

Support measures in place included the Personalised Learning Centre which could be accessed by those needing support with repeat behaviours, and where pupils students could study alone. Support through mental health counselling was available here.

The Bridge was a dedicated area for anxious students, including those who had been out of education for some time, and some with physical needs. There was a limit of 5 or 6 pupils within the unit at any one time, and students may spend some lessons in there or the full day.

The Principal shared anonymised data showing recent Stockton school attainment, including for disadvantaged pupils. The Principal believed a key issue for the Borough was the relatively poor performance of disadvantaged children in secondary schools. One element of improving standards was stated to be a greater focus on good behaviour across the Board to allow greater time to focus on the vulnerable.

We had sight of the school's figures on Progress 8 including for disadvantaged pupils, compared with other schools (not named) in Stockton Borough. The Principal was forecasting significant improvement in the figures for 2018 for North Shore. The average progress of those who had received FTEs in Year 11 was projected to be higher than the previous year group's results.

Across the Borough it was stated that there was poor progress in English and Maths particularly in relation to disadvantaged pupils, even where schools had relatively lower levels of disadvantaged pupils attending the school, and relatively higher Average Points Scores on entry in Year 7.

One member of the visit was 'very impressed with the Principal, his passion and desire to improve outcomes was very commendable. The reality was a far different picture to that portrayed in the figures for FTEs. The projected improvement in exam results would be due to increased desire for the children to succeed not because the troublesome children have been excluded. The Principal did his level best to keep children in school and did not wish to permanently exclude any child. He always looked beneath the surface to find reasons for a child's behaviour.

Michael Robson is an extremely passionate Principal and whole-heartedly believes the children's outcomes can be vastly improved including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged'.

Any recommendations / feedback for consideration?

None on the day.

Consideration will be given to feedback as part of the Committee's final reporting.

Signed: Cllr Clark, Cllr Cunningham, Cllr Walmsley, Cllr Watson, Peter Mennear

Date: 26 April 2018