

My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/MJH

24 May 2016

Councillor Sarah Merry
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Neuadd y Sir
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Dear Sarah

Cabinet proposal Meadowbank School – Specialist Provision for Primary Aged Pupils with Speech and Language Difficulties, and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties

The Committee has asked me to write to you following its consideration of the Cabinet report on the proposals for Meadowbank School, views of a number of interested stakeholders, as well as comments contained in the Estyn inspection letter and the Directorate Quarter 4 performance report, at Committee on 17 May 2016.

I was initially contacted by a number of people who were concerned about the proposals for Meadowbank School. As you are aware a Scrutiny Committee may invite anyone whom it believes can make a useful contribution to address it, discuss issues of local concern and/or answer questions. To this end I agreed to include an item on the agenda to enable anyone wishing to express a view on the proposals to address the Committee.

At the Committee meeting a number of parents and staff, the chair of governors and a third sector organisation expressed their wish to address the Committee and / or submit documents for the Committee to consider. The Committee heard some very passionate comments about the education and support provided by the school, and how these proposals could impact on the future outcome of pupils with speech and language difficulties and with behavioural emotional and social difficulties.

The Committee is fully aware that the consultation period had ended, however having read and considered the information in the Cabinet report and reflected on the information provided by the parents, staff and governors the Members agreed to provide you with its comments, concern and recommendations in respect of the policy and service development proposed in the Cabinet report dated 3 December 2015, prior to the final decision being taken by Cabinet.

The Committee also reflected on comments made by Estyn: *“Pupils most at risk of exclusion often have speech and language difficulties”* and also the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning in the Quarter 4 performance report *“There is a decline in performance on both National strategic indicators relating to the timeliness of processing Statements of Special Educational Needs and targets have not been met. The main contributory factors to this decline are*

1) An increase in the volume of requests for statutory assessments and the associated work

2) A commitment to try to resolve issues with parents/carers which often extends timescales

3) Challenges in securing placements at specialist provisions

4) The capacity of the Education Psychology Service and Local Health Board to respond to the increase in demand for advice.

Action to improve performance is focused upon reducing the reliance upon statements to meet children's needs in mainstream schools, by introducing alternative provision, funding models, business processes and improved information sharing."

The Committee discussed in detail the Cabinet report and information provided, and agreed to raise the following issues for you to take into consideration, prior to the approval of the proposals for Meadowbank School at Cabinet in the near future. We believe that the school should remain open until:

- a. A detailed Cardiff wide strategy for the provision of Speech and Language Difficulties, and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties support, is developed, consulted on and implemented.
- b. An assessment of current support for children with Speech and Language Difficulties, and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties across Cardiff's primary schools is undertaken, and is determined to be fit for purpose.
- c. The professional views of all primary and secondary head teachers on the impact of pupils with Speech and Language Difficulties, and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties currently in their schools is sought and assessed.
- d. Further discussions are held with the school and appropriate third sector organisations on the support and needs of children and young people with Speech and Language Difficulties, and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties.
- e. That the school's expertise is promoted as a centre of excellence or as a training centre for teachers across Cardiff and the wider region.
- f. Ensure that the Council continues to provide early specialist intervention, as it is considered to be the most effective and efficient method of managing children with special educational needs.

The Committee also wishes to receive anonymised data on the number and cost of any "Out of County" placements of children with Speech and Language Difficulties,

and with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties, as it was unable to assess from the Cabinet report the financial impact of the overall proposals.

The Committee recommends that you consider the above points before you agree the final proposals for Meadowbank School, and that you inform the Committee of your views on the above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Cook', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR RICHARD COOK
Chair – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

CC: Nick Batchelar, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Angela Kent, Head of Achievement and Inclusion.