

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

1 JULY 2019

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Autism Partnership Board

For over two years now, Green Councillors have been asking what happened to the Autism Partnership Board, which played a vital role in supporting autistic people in Reading. In 2017 we were told by a Labour Councillor that it had not met 'in recent months' and that it would recommence meeting in early 2018 - when it hadn't in fact met for a whole year. Can the new Lead Councillor please tell us - has the Autism Partnership Board now recommenced as promised, and if not, what is happening ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor Jones, the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Jones, Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:

The Adult Care & Health Services (DACHS) department recognise the importance of this board which is in the process of being refreshed by Jon Dickinson (Deputy Director Adult Social Services) and will be chaired by Jo Purser (Locality Service Manager). It has met once this year but the previous chair has now left the organisation hence the delay in organising a follow up meeting.

The meeting will be led by DACHS with participation from Brighter Futures for Children, Commissioning Colleagues, Workforce Leads and key voluntary sector organisations such as Reading Mencap, Autism Berkshire, Autism Matters, AutAngel, etc.

There is further work taking place regarding Autism services in other areas:

- BHFT have undertaken an internal review of ASD assessment in the Berkshire West patch and East Berkshire are undertaking an all age review of the ASD assessment and ADHD care pathways.
- Work is overseen via SEND JIG and upcoming ICS Children's Board in the West.

The RBC Local Offer page gives information of locally available services:

<http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/advice.page?id=0XujKppTS4o>

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QUESTION 2 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Ending Toxic Testing in Primary Schools

A recent National Education Union campaign has highlighted the fact that the pressures of statutory assessment contribute to the crisis of teacher morale, workload, recruitment and retention. Tests are focused on the requirements of school accountability rather than on support for children's learning. The pressures of testing in primary schools have a detrimental effect on children's mental health and educational research has demonstrated that teaching to the test narrows the curriculum and the educational experience of children, focusing on labelling not learning.

Will the Lead Councillor for Education express his support for campaigns against the current system of primary assessment, including those organised by teacher unions and More Than A Score, and will he offer this Council's support to schools within the Borough which adopt an alternative approach to assessment for example by taking the More Than A Score pledge?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

I invite Councillor Pearce, the Lead Councillor for Education to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Pearce, Lead Councillor for Education:

I thank Cllr White for his question on what is such an important issue at this time of year for the students, parents and teachers involved.

In my first year as Lead Councillor for Education I have visited around 40 schools including most of our primary schools, one during SATS week. I spoke with students who told me of the pressures this was putting on them and the anguish it causes their entire families. Students want to do well in any test they take. In the past I was a governor at Ridgeway Primary for over five years, where I also saw the impact SATS week had on our teachers, their stress levels and workload.

The 'More than a score' campaign asks schools to sign up to a pledge where they agree to deliver a rich, broad, creative curriculum, to avoid putting any unnecessary pressure on children to achieve particular scores, and assess pupils in a more rounded way with SATs forming only a small part of the overall picture.

Schools in Reading have a range of approaches to curriculum and assessment and we do not have a preferred approach. We support and challenge our schools based on a range of research, performance indicators and our understanding of their unique contexts and priorities. Their opinions about the impact of testing are also diverse.

We are confident through our programme of school visits, work with Governors, SATS monitoring and moderation processes that our schools manage statutory assessments in a way that minimises disruption and stress to their pupils. We would strongly refute suggestion that our Headteachers focus on teaching to the test above teaching for learning. Our Ofsted inspections have not identified excessive curriculum narrowing in our Primary Schools.

A couple of weeks ago I met with representatives from the local NEU to discuss their high stakes testing motion that Councillor White refers to. I raised this issue with primary heads just last week to gather their thoughts on this motion and how they view SATS. This motion will be discussed with Labour colleagues this month (Labour party policy is of course to abolish these high stakes tests), with the view to potentially bringing a motion to full Council in October, which leaves more than enough time to organise meetings and to discuss any alternative approaches that any school may decide on before next summer's SATs tests.

I will again be asking for Heads' opinions in my regular update that will be sent out this month as it is they who should ultimately decide how their schools are run and how their students are assessed.