
Gatehouse School

An independent
management review

Executive Summary

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Foreword

When Milton Keynes Council began to have serious concerns about the manner in which the wellbeing of pupils at Gatehouse School was being promoted, it took the courageous but entirely appropriate step of commissioning an independent external review. Kathryn Stone OBE was invited to lead this review, and may be felt to have been a very perceptive choice, combining a national and international reputation for the promotion of children's rights, with personal experience of Milton Keynes and its services. I was invited to provide consultation on safeguarding practice to the review and to prepare a brief foreword to the report of the review.

Those of us working in children's services in the 1970s remember all too well a number of celebrated examples of educational establishments apparently able to function according to their own rules, relatively untouched by any system of supervision or oversight which might have been expected to identify their shortcomings.

I think that most of us had assumed that the massive increase in the extent and complexity of external regulation of education and social care which has occurred in the succeeding decades had made it very unlikely that such issues would arise again. However, the allegations which arose concerning not only the practice but also the culture of Gatehouse School gave Milton Keynes Council serious cause for concern that acute problems might have gone

unrecognised and this report arises from the Council's determination to ensure that this matter was explored thoroughly.

In general, where sustained departures from good practice have been identified, we may find their roots in personal failings, in structural failings, or in a combination of the two. However, we must recognise that individual error is much more likely where the structures which support and/or ensure good performance are weak. Even when individual weaknesses with respect to personality, attitude, knowledge and skill are central concerns, their potential for harm can only be fully realised when the surrounding managerial and inter-disciplinary environment fails to identify and deal effectively with the issues which arise from these. Addressing this fact may, in some ways, be felt to represent the most demanding challenge facing Milton Keynes Council as it reflects on how to respond to the findings of this report.

Patrick Ayre

Childcare specialist, independent consultant and senior lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire

13 January 2009

1 Summary of Findings

- 1.1 The full and final report of the management review of Gatehouse School highlights a number of fundamental limitations in communication, processes and procedures relating to the management and monitoring of Gatehouse School.
- 1.2 Together with other reports, commissioned to consider different aspects of the work and life of the school and wider processes, an impression is given of an ineffectively monitored school that has been left to its own devices.
- 1.3 These reports must inform a broader debate about the accountability and responsibility of a local authority in relation to the management of schools in its area. For example, this review and other concurrent investigations show serious breaches of financial, recruitment and selection, and safeguarding children procedures.
- 1.4 There also appears to be confusion about who is responsible for which aspect of school life; and even where responsibility has been apparent, barriers of time and overwrought bureaucracy have seemed to have hampered swift remedial action.
- 1.5 The full and final report further highlights the need to review the role of governors and elected members, in relation to schools, to ensure

that where there are concerns about any aspect of the running of a school these can be dealt with promptly; and by those with sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to do so. There is evidence that the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services, Ms Sandra Clarke, had made a number of efforts to have her concerns addressed.

- 1.6 The mechanisms for the reporting of abuse and concerns have failed in the case of Gatehouse School, leaving children, families, staff and others vulnerable to further abuse and poor practice. There is, however, no suggestion that the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures in Milton Keynes is limited.
- 1.7 Milton Keynes Council has, to its credit, accepted that practices in the school fell far short of what should have been reasonably expected and, once senior management were alerted, immediate action was taken to remedy the situation.
- 1.8 Given the nature and extent of concerns raised about the conduct of the school, questions will rightly be asked about whether the school should have been closed permanently. Ultimately, the local authority decided against this. One staff member said it would be "unconscionable to close the school", denying the children an education and withdrawing support from families who are in need. This is a strong argument. However, it could equally be argued that education should not take priority over safety and there are areas highlighted in this report, and elsewhere, which have shown that children's safety has been potentially compromised.

1.9 By commissioning this independent review and fully supporting the process of the review, the council is commended for tackling this situation in a positive, pro-active way to learn the lessons necessary to make sure these events never happen again.

2 Summary of recommendations (final report)

The following recommendations are extracted from the full and final report and are repeated in full.

2.1 Recommendation 1

Each child's education and care plan is reviewed by a multi-agency team with a view to identifying and agreeing the best approach to individual needs

2.2 Recommendation 2

All staff must receive specialist training in the management of children's behaviour, including distraction, de-escalation and other techniques as positive alternatives to restraint.

2.3 Recommendation 3

The Local Authority should satisfy itself that all its schools have carried out appropriate and timely employment checks on all staff.

2.4 Recommendation 4

Only governors and senior staff who have undertaken local authority approved training should be permitted to take part in the selection, recruitment and monitoring of staff.

2.5 Recommendation 5

The local authority must ensure that all recruitment and selection processes in community schools are monitored carefully so that all staff recruited are suitable to work with children and young people and that all nationally and locally agreed indicators are complied with. The Local Authority also needs to ensure that Governors in other schools are aware of their duties in this respect.

2.6 Recommendation 6

In monitoring recruitment and selection processes in community schools, regard should be given to analysis of staff turnover, sickness, disciplinary and other matters.

2.7 Recommendation 7

That a staff forum be established as means of sharing ideas for improvements to practice.

2.8 Recommendation 8

There should be a review of the communication between and within departments of the Council to ensure the opportunities for errors are limited.

2.9 Recommendation 9

Whistleblowing procedures should be reviewed and promoted across the council.

2.10 Recommendation 10

Appropriate Health Authority staff should be asked to review records of medication and to provide training on effective recording

2.11 Recommendation 11

A student forum should be established as a means of enabling children to comment on developments at the school.

2.12 Recommendation 12

Consideration should be given to improving the facilities at Cripps Lodge in consultation with staff.

2.13 Recommendation 13

There should be a comprehensive training package available to all school governors with mandatory elements on safeguarding.

2.14 Recommendation 14

Governors' decisions should be subject to periodic monitoring and review by the local authority in schools within its responsibility.

2.15 Recommendation 15

A critical incident team should be created to respond to one-off incidents of this nature. The team should be equipped with appropriate procedures, lines of reporting and communication and so on.

3 Summary of recommendations (initial overview report)

As well as the final report, the review prepared an initial overview report, dated 20 September 2008. The following recommendations are extracted from that initial overview report and are repeated in full.

Child protection and use of restraint

3.1 Recommendation 1

There must be a thorough review of the safeguarding processes in the Children's Services Department. This must include the ways in which all concerns about child protection are passed to the Referral and Assessment Team (RAAT) in social care from the school and from other departments.

3.2 Recommendation 2

There must be a review of the recording of allegations and how these are communicated and followed up. There must be clear steps for all allegations to follow. (It might be that some staff feel that this exists currently. If it does, it is not being implemented in all cases)

3.3 **Recommendation 3**

There must be clarity about who is responsible for what in relation to safeguarding within the department and how the social care and education elements work together.

3.4 **Recommendation 4**

Any allegation of abuse of children, however received, must be investigated in accordance with the law and procedures. Failure to do this must result in disciplinary action.

3.5 **Recommendation 5**

There are staff whose actions would appear to have fallen short of the reasonable expectations commensurate with their role. This needs investigation. The outcomes of these investigations must form part of additional reminders to all staff what the expectations of them are in relation to their safeguarding responsibilities

3.6 **Recommendation 6**

All staff involved in restraint of children must be trained, have updated training regularly and be subject to careful monitoring of their practice. Any staff involved in the appropriate and necessary restraint of children must know that their actions will need to stand up to the closest scrutiny. Therefore detailed records must be kept of all episodes of restraint in accordance with published guidance. These records must be reviewed regularly and must be able to stand up to the careful external examination

3.7 Recommendation 7

Any concerns about inappropriate restraint or unjustified restraint must be investigated.

3.8 Recommendation 8

It should be confirmed that all classrooms and other rooms comply with all Health & Safety guidance in existence for schools of this type.

3.9 Recommendation 9

The Chief Fire Officer must be invited to conduct a full fire safety assessment of the school

3.10 Recommendation 10

Children must not be locked in classrooms with no means of escape in case of fire.

Police involvement

3.11 Recommendation 11

The Local Authority Designated Officer and partner agencies review their approach in relation to the particular child's circumstances discussed in the initial overview report.

3.12 Recommendation 12

CPS Direct (a service that provides out of hours charging advice on behalf of the 42 Crown Prosecution Service areas in England and Wales) should be used to expedite cases outside “office hours”.

3.13 Recommendation 13

All staff understand the difference between a strategy meeting and a professionals meeting and the status of each one.

Culture of bullying

3.14 Recommendation 14

There should be a review of the vision, mission and values of the school. All managers, staff, governors, elected members, parents and children must have a shared understanding of the purpose of the school.

3.15 Recommendation 15

Allegations of staff bullying other staff warrant investigation. If there are difficulties with the management of the staff then these need to be addressed.

3.16 Recommendation 16

Concerns about bullying of staff by the head and deputy need independent investigation, supported by the governors of the school.

3.17 Recommendation 17

Any allegations of bullying of children by staff or other children need investigation in line with appropriate procedures and the outcomes need recording, reviewing regularly and being used to inform changes in practice at the school.

Staffing

3.18 Recommendation 18

The staffing structure at the school is reviewed in line with the questions set out in the report.

3.19 Recommendation 19

A skills audit is undertaken of all staff, to highlight the strengths and weaknesses in the current staff team.

3.20 Recommendation 20

All staff must be clear what the school is there for and their role within it.

Turnover of pupils

3.21 Recommendation 21

An audit is conducted of the movement of pupils into and out of the school, paying careful attention to where they came from, how long they stayed, where they went to and why.

Complaints

3.22 Recommendation 22

All complaints must be addressed in line with the law, council policy and procedure.

3.23 Recommendation 23

All complaints must be recorded and evaluated to inform changes to practice.

3.24 Recommendation 24

The complaints procedure should be made available to parents and children.

3.25 Recommendation 25

Children should have access to an independent advocacy service

3.26 Recommendation 26

An audit should be carried out of complaints in the past three years identifying themes and actions taken to resolve them.

Communication and information

3.27 Recommendation 27

There should be a review of the communication between and within departments to ensure the opportunities for errors are limited

4 Background to Investigation and Report

- 4.1 Gatehouse School, which opened in 1990, is a local authority school for up to 60 secondary-aged boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has weekly boarding accommodation.
- 4.2 Following allegations made about practice in the school, an independent review was commissioned to investigate the allegations, to review procedures, and to recommend the way forward to restoring a quality of service that children and parents have a right to expect. This report is the findings of that review carried out between September 2008 and January 2009.
- 4.3 The review was conducted by Kathryn Stone with John Smith. Support was also given to the review by childcare specialist Patrick Ayre, an independent consultant and senior lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire, and Graham Hopkins, a nationally recognised expert on effective recording.
- 4.4 The review began with a specific focus on concerns about practices within the school and, necessarily, extended to include wider concerns about the role of other departments, individuals and agencies, and their relationship to the school.

4.5 The terms of reference for the review were to:

- review the provision of education and care
- consider the management and environment
- review the implementation of policies and procedures with particular reference to Safeguarding Children; Managing Challenging Behaviour; Restraint; Medication; and Complaints
- review communication from, to and between parents, Children and Young People's services and other departments in Milton Keynes Council
- highlight positive practice, identify limitations and make recommendations for change.

4.6 As a result of emerging information, the review focused on the second, third and fourth items on the above list. It is understood that separate arrangements are being made to consider curriculum, activities and care at the school. Peter Doyle, the Acting Headteacher since 8 October 2008, has been widely credited with bringing a stability and order to the school at a time of great uncertainty for staff, pupils and families.

4.7 The full and final report adopts a thematic approach as many of the concerns raised can be assigned to one or more particular themes.

These are:

- Restraint and Physical Intervention
- Recruitment and Selection
- Communication and Information

- Structure
- School Governors and Elected Members, and
- Leadership and Management.

4.8 Each of these themes was examined using evidence from the review and related investigations, and limitations in services have been highlighted and recommendations for change have been made – all of which form part of this Executive Summary.

4.9 It is important to note that, during the course of the review, an initial overview report was made on 20 September 2008. This made 27 recommendations – all of which have been reproduced in this Executive Summary.

4.10 I am acutely aware of the sensitive nature of this review and its various reports in the current wider context; for example, of a national review of safeguarding children and annual performance assessments. This context is set out on page 21 of this Executive Summary.

4.11 Nonetheless, however uncomfortable these matters are, they must be addressed as a means of providing a safe educational environment for children attending Gatehouse School. Children and their families have a right to an education that meets their individual needs and aspirations, and one that is conducted in a way that promotes child welfare and safety. They deserve nothing less. I am confident that by commissioning

this review Milton Keynes Council has made a clear commitment to these principles.

5 National & Local Context

National Context

- 5.1 As stated, the full and final report is written against a backdrop of unprecedented national scrutiny of social work and child safeguarding practice. Reports of the death of “Baby P” in Haringey, the same London Borough previously in the headlines following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000, sparked a national debate about the competence or otherwise of social workers and those responsible for safeguarding children, including police, and health and education staff. It has also sparked a national review led by Lord Laming of the extent to which his recommendations, following his inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, had been implemented by local authorities.
- 5.2 Additionally, Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education), the inspectorate responsible for all the regulation and inspection of all children’s services in England and Wales, is under scrutiny for failing to identify fundamental limitations in practice in Haringey and elsewhere. It is likely this will lead to sweeping changes in the inspection regime.
- 5.3 The trial of Karen Matthews and Michael Donovan for the kidnap and abuse of Shannon Matthews also drew negative attention to the role of those responsible for safeguarding children, as did the trial of a 56-year-old Sheffield businessman for the rape of his two daughters,

impregnating them 19 times and fathering 9 children, two of whom died on the day of birth.

- 5.4 A task force to review the education and training of social workers has also been established led by Moira Gibb CBE, Chief Executive of Camden Council. This is due to report to the Children's Secretary, Ed Balls, in the spring of this year.
- 5.5 Coincidentally, since the Gatehouse School review began there has hardly been a day without a report in a national newspaper about the limitations of social workers and others and how children are at risk of harm due to perceived incompetence of those charged with their safety.
- 5.6 This management review of Gatehouse School also comes at a time when the Howard League for Penal Reform are calling for an end to the use of physical restraint in prisons and secure training centres for young people.

Local context

- 5.7 Within this pressurised national context, Milton Keynes Council had itself undergone a period of intense scrutiny following a damning report on the Council's school build programme which led to the resignation of the former Chief Executive, John Best, along with the cabinet member responsible for school buildings. Since the

appointment of Kate Page as Chief Executive, there is reported to be more stability and leadership.

- 5.8 Within the Council's responsibility for the wider social services, there has seemingly been substantial change since May 2008. Directors of Service have come and gone. A major restructuring exercise has seen staff move from Social Care and Health (responsible for adult social care) to Children and Young People's Services. Many senior staff retired, resigned or moved on to new roles, leaving the majority of senior staff responsible for children's social care as temporary interim appointments. The impact of this is discussed in the full and final report.
- 5.9 A serious case review is also being undertaken following the death of a pupil of Gatehouse School. The overview report is being written by Paul Kerswell and has been delayed pending the outcomes of other investigations into Gatehouse School.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This review has uncovered a number of serious limitations in process and communication which have contributed to the maintenance of unacceptable and weak practices at Gatehouse School. These must not continue.
- 6.2 In contrast, the reviewers have been impressed by the positive commitment and capabilities of many people at various levels in the organisation, and by the resolve and leadership of Chief Executive, the Director of Children and Young People's Services and senior officers to make sure that lessons are learnt and to make forward progress promptly and appropriately. This must continue.