

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 26 February 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor L Kelly (Chair)
Councillor J Birdi
Councillor S Gray (Substitute for Councillor E Reeves)
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor R Thay

Co-Opted Members: Mrs S Hanson (Nominated by the Church of England)
Mr D Jackson
Mr G Vohra (Nominated from other faith groups in the city)

Other Members (by invitation): Councillor K Sandhu – Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Councillor P Seaman – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Councillor B Christopher – Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Others in attendance: Helen Nelson - Chair of Primary Partnership
Ana Neofitou - Vice Chair of Secondary Partnership

Employees (by Service Area):

Education and Children S Sen (Director of Education and Children's Services),
J Gillum, M Legard, R Sugars

Law and Governance G Holmes, M Salmon

Apologies: Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor S Jobbar
Councillor E Reeves

Public Business

33. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable interests.

34. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 22nd January 2026 were agreed and signed as a true record.

The Board noted that further to Recommendation 2) in Minute 30/25 headed 'Holiday Activity and Food Programme', the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People had agreed the recommendation.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People informed the Board that Margaret Conway, the Council's Vanguard Partnership Lead, had recently won two awards. The first award being the National Children and Young People's Award. The second award being in the Equality and Diversity category of the Women Achieving Greatness in Social Care Awards. Margaret received an invitation to St James' Palace earlier this month to meet King Charles, Her Majesty Queen Camilla, the Duchess of Edinburgh and the Duke of Gloucester, in recognition of her achievements over the last 38 years working in Children's Services. The Board requested that a letter of congratulations be sent to her for her achievements.

35. **Coventry Education Performance 2025**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Children's Services and Education that provided an update on Coventry's education performance for 2025 that included the following:

- Trends in pupil numbers
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Phonics
- Key Stage (KS) 2
- Key Stage (KS) 4 (provisional)
- 16-19 attainment (provisional)
- Post-16 participation in education, employment or training
- Attendance and exclusions
- Difference in performance between males and females
- Performance of vulnerable groups

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Helen Nelson, Chair of Primary Partnership and Headteacher at Joseph Cash Primary School, and Ana Neofitou, Vice Chair of Secondary Partnership, attended the meeting for this item of business.

Data was set out in an Appendix to the Briefing Note and published data available through government sources was also included. The DfE released updated performance tables data each year, which meant there could be slight difference in previous years figures. For operational and planning purposes the Local Authority (LA) also use NCER Nexus and FFT Aspire, which were used as management information by most Local Authorities. This enabled further in-depth analysis but was not quoted as not published and regional and national comparisons might not represent the total cohort. Further Appendices to the report provided: comparative groups and A levels points; Coventry Education Partnership priorities 2024-25; and a glossary of terms.

The vision of the Coventry Education Partnership encompassed high expectations for the achievement of children and young people to achieve their full potential whatever their culture or background. Statutorily it was the responsibility of school

leaders to secure improvement in their school, but as part of the working partnership with all schools and settings, the LA acted as champions of educational excellence, forging strong professional relationships and networks. The LA, in partnership with the primary school networks and secondary collaboratives (including special schools), facilitated and supported schools in the city on their improvement journey.

Overall, Coventry's performance compared favourably with statistical neighbours for some measures – these statistical neighbours were directly comparable to Coventry because of similarities in size and other important characteristics. For many (but not all) of the key performance measures, Coventry was below national average, and this reflected the characteristics of the city in comparison to all local authorities nationally. However, national averages remained the target, and all Coventry schools continued to strive to meet or exceed national benchmarks. In considering the briefing note and the presentation by officers, the Board discussed issues, asked questions and received responses from officers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on matters including:

- The growing numbers of children in the city that had been accommodated in schools through the implementation of a total of 11 bulge classes, creating 1500 additional places. Some children had also been placed under the Fair Access Protocol
- In-year admissions funding - schools were funded based on the school census and a growth fund was available to support bulge classes
- Exclusions - there was a good working relationship with Head Teachers that all possible options be explored to avoid this course of action. A lot of work had been undertaken around belonging, what support could be given for their individual needs, and what alternative provision could be offered where appropriate
- Recognition that some children had unmet longstanding needs from Primary that carried through to secondary.
- Family First Partnerships Programme provided early intervention to support to parents' engagement in the education process
- Generational change important going forward to support attendance at school
- Building relationships with families helped to identify the support required. A multi-agency approach was applied to the multifaceted situations of some families, this included issues such as deprivation, domestic abuse, and mental health
- Coventry continued to demonstrate strong post 16 participation, with its September guarantee performance remaining consistently above both national and regional figures
- Despite the slight rise in the combined NEET and Not Known rate in 2025, Coventry performed better than England and the West Midlands reflecting sustained success in supporting young people to remain in education, employment or training.
- Coventry mirrored the national trend on suspension figures. Suspensions, which could be for a number of hours, days or weeks, could arise from: unmet needs played out through behaviour; family issues; social media influences; and mental health issues

- The effects of austerity and Covid could not be underestimated - children away from the learning environment with no interaction and socialisation with others, had resulted in a number of challenges. The direct and indirect effects of Covid, which did not affect all children equally, were not yet known as the children were still progressing through school stages
- There had been an improvement in children achieving a good level of development on school readiness, however there were still children not school ready particularly in the Reception year where children were not toilet trained. Children in Reception now had been born during Covid so parents had not had the usual access to support. Work was continuing to engage parents
- There was a strong focus on school attendance, measured against the national average, with work undertaken if figures were not met. Good practice was offered between schools with a collective responsibility for attendance between schools and families
- Work was continuing on transport issues that has affected attendance at Special Schools to ensure a sustained service provision

RESOLVED that the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) Noted the information provided**
- 2) Had no further recommendations to make to the Cabinet Member**
- 3) Had no further areas for further scrutiny to be added to the Work Programme**

36. SEND Strategy Update

The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note and presentation of the Director of Education and Children’s Services that provided an update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The presentation was attached as an Appendix to the report. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People attended the meeting for this item of business.

At the meeting on 13 March 2025 (minute 72/24 referred), the Board requested an update on any reforms proposed at a national level and also on preparation for an inspection. A seminar for all Members was held on 12 January 2026.

Following significant and major SEND reforms announced by the Government, a White Paper had been issued on 23rd February 2026. The main headlines of the Paper were: staff development – workforce reform; family hubs; inclusion bases; experts at hand – having an expert team available to schools around support to SEND needs; and Individual Support Plans to run alongside EHCPs. Many of the proposals aligned with what Coventry was already doing and the LA’s direction of travel. Work would now be undertaken to understand the mechanisms in the White Paper, including access to funding.

The presentation provided information on the following:

- Local Area Inspection
- SEND Self Evaluation

- SEND Local Reform Plan (new requirement)
- Focus Areas: SEND & Alternative Provision (AP) Self Evaluation – Outcomes & Experiences and System Leadership
- Outcomes & Experiences of Young People with SEND and their Families - Identification & Participation and Access, Transition & Inclusion
- System Leadership across the Local Area Partnership - Ambition & Engagement, Joint Information & Commissioning, and Evaluation & Multi-Agency Working
- Delivering Change – Governance, SEND Transformation Priorities, Workforce Development, Adaptive Provision, Alternative Provision, Enhanced Resource Provision, Specialist Provision, Further Priorities, and National Direction of Travel

In considering the briefing note and the presentation by officers, the Board discussed issues, asked questions and received responses from officers and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on matters including:

- The Authority was working hard on SEND recognising the growth in this area
- A SEND Local Area Inspection was due in Coventry, last completed in 2019. The date of inspection was not yet confirmed. Coventry would hope to gain placement in one of the top two rating bands as it had done previously
- Some work had already been undertaken for the proposal to replace EHCPs by the year 2030, with work ongoing. Funding to support the proposals could be through use of reserves, which had been done previously to support operational change
- Speech and language therapy – definite recognition for the service which has seen an increase in need. Commissioning arrangements were in place for this provision and the ‘experts at hand’ identified in the SEND White Paper, could also provide further support in this area
- A review of children at the transition from Primary to Secondary stage was important to recognise any changing needs
- Coventry had been visited by the Minister for Education to look at what was working well and what needed change or further improvement.
- Recognition that the best outcomes for children, provided through Education Services and Children’s Services, was achieved by offering relevant support for all their needs and the operation of valuable partnership working to enable them to gain an education.

The Board requested that a Briefing Note on how successfully the Council’s SEND Strategy aligned with the proposals in the Government’s SEND White Paper, be circulated to them.

RESOLVED that, the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) Notes the information in the Appendix to the Briefing Note.**
- 2) Has no further recommendations to make to the Cabinet Member.**

37. **Work Programme 2025/26**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator that provided a schedule of items for meetings of the Board for the Municipal Year. The Work Programme for 2025/26 was attached as an Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) notes the schedule of items for meetings of the Board for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

38. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.25 am)