

Children and Young People's Partnership Board
13 January 2016
Report of the Independent Chair of the Education Challenge Board,
Frances Done

1.	<p>Executive Summary: The purpose of this report is to update members on the work and progress of the Education Challenge Board (the Board) which was established in November 2014.</p> <p>The Board monitors progress and provides challenge for Walsall's School Improvement Strategy and associated improvement plan by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing constructive challenge to those responsible both for delivering improved outcomes in schools and those providing support to schools' improvement. • Monitoring the raising of standards at all key stages across all schools and Academies. • Monitoring the proportion of schools judged good and better as well as those requiring improvement. • Evaluating the impact of improved leadership and management. • Evaluating the impact of the Council's School Improvement function. • Monitoring and evaluating the progress of the post Ofsted actions to ensure they are contributing to the strategic aims of the overall school improvement strategy. <p>The report outlines progress in three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Current performance of schools 2. Progress in implementing the Action Plan. 3. The revision to the School Improvement Strategy, Action Plan and associated scorecard. <p>The report includes the Board's views on areas of progress and areas of concern and future focus in relation to implementation of the Action Plan.</p>
1.1	<p>Reason for scrutiny: The Ofsted inspection report relating to local authority school improvement services published in June 2014 found that the local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement were ineffective.</p>
1.2	<p>Recommendations: The Partnership Board is asked to note the report, including the revised School Improvement Strategy, and comment as appropriate.</p>
1.3	<p>Background papers: School Improvement Strategy and Action Plan.</p>
1.4	<p>Resource and legal considerations: None</p>

1.5	Citizen impact: None
1.6	Environmental impact: None
1.7	Performance management: None
1.8	Equality Implications: None
1.9	Consultation: None
1.10	Contact Officer: Lynda Poole Assistant Director: Access and Achievement 01922 65 2895 poolel@walsall.gov.uk
2.	<p>Background and current position</p> <p>The Ofsted inspection report relating to local authority school improvement services published in June 2014 found that the local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement were ineffective.</p> <p>In response to Ofsted's finding the Children and Young People's Partnership approved a School Improvement Strategy and a related Action Plan. One of the commitments in the Plan was the establishment of an Education Challenge Board with an independent chair which is monitoring progress and providing challenge for the implementation of Walsall's Strategy. This is being achieved by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing constructive challenge to those responsible both for delivering improved outcomes in schools and those providing support to schools' improvement. 2. Monitoring the raising of standards at all key stages across all schools and academies. 3. Monitoring the proportion of schools judged good and better as well as those requiring improvement. 4. Evaluating the impact of improved leadership and management. 5. Evaluating the impact of the Council's School Improvement function. 6. Monitoring and evaluating the progress of the post Ofsted actions to ensure they are contributing to the strategic aims of the overall school improvement strategy. <p>In addition the Board is;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the progress being made in enabling schools to play a full role as the key universal service in the wider partnership for children.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the quality and impact of services available to support and challengeschools and other settings. • Evaluating the impact of sector led improvement and research in practice on school improvement. <p>The Board is required to report to the Children and Young People’s Partnership and this is the second report to the Partnership since the establishment of the Board in November 2014. The Board has met seven times during 2015.</p> <p>The membership of the Board comprises representatives of the Headteacher and Governor School Improvement Working Group; Secondary, Primary and Special School Headteachers, a governor of aPrimary school, a business person from Walsall, and an academic from Warwick University in addition to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People,the Director of Children’s Services and the Assistant Director, Access andAchievement. .</p> <p>Since my last report the Education Challenge Board has focussed on three key areas,summarised in the report below namely;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing current performance of schools • monitoring progress in implementing the Action Plan and • advising on the revision to the School Improvement Strategy, Action Plan and high level scorecard.
<p>3.</p>	<p>Reviewing Performance</p> <p>At each of its meetings the Board has carefully reviewed the latest available performance data in relation to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); Key Stages 1, 2, 4 and 5; and Ofsted school inspection results.</p> <p>The latest data shows the following;</p> <p>Early Years Foundation Stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% improvement in Good Level of Development in 2 years; 8% in 2015, narrowing the gap with national by 2% <p>Year 1 Phonics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently above national average, by 2% in 2015 <p>Key Stage1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading at L2+: Walsall overall 90%, 1% improvement in 2015 and narrowed the gap to meet the national average. Local authority maintained schools exceeded the national average by 1% at 91%. • Writing at L2+: Walsall overall 86%, 2% improvement in 2015 and narrowed the gap with national average to 2%. Local authority maintained schools achieved 88% and met the national average. • Maths at L2+: Walsall overall 92%, 1% improvement in 2015, a 1% gap with the national average remained. Local authority maintained schools

achieved 93% and met the national average.

Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Maths (Combined)

- Walsall overall 3% improvement in 2015, 4% gap with national average
- Local authority maintained schools: an upward 4 year trend (6% improvement), 3% improvement in 2015, 4% gap with national.
- Converter Academies: a downward 4 year trend (4% decline), static in 2015, 3% gap with national
- Sponsored Academies: a downward 3 year trend (9% decline) 2% decline in 2015, 22% gap with national

The KS2 results, where Walsall schools achievement of 76% is 4% below the national average of 80% for Level 4+ Reading, Writing and Maths combined. At this key stage the local authority ranks 142 out of 152 authorities and it represents a key area of focus for improvement. Whereas local authority maintained schools have reduced the 'gap to national' since 2014 sponsored academies are showing declining performance – 58% against the national average of 80%.

Key Stage 4 – 5+A*-C, including English and Maths

- Walsall overall 1% improvement in 2015, 3% gap with national average
- Local authority maintained schools: 8% improvement in 2015 to 55%, 2% above national average
- Converter Academies: 7% decline in 2015 to 52%, 1% below national average
- Sponsored Academies: 4% improvement in 2015 to 44%, 11% below national average

.Key Stage 5

Average points per candidate for Walsall has declined 8 points from 695 in 2014 to 687 in 2015. This follows the trend nationally where points per candidate has dropped 14 points. Due to the decline nationally, Walsall's ranking has actually improved 7 places to 57. Average point score per entry has increased slightly from 210 to 212 points. National results have remained steady at 215. Walsall's ranking has improved significantly by 21 places from 87 to 66.

The overall picture at KS5 is therefore relatively good. However individual performance of sixth forms varies considerably and the Board will be focussing on performance at sixth form level during 2016.

Published OFSTED judgements on school inspections since December 2013 are showing an improving trend;

Schools judged good or outstanding by OFSTED

	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>December 2013</td> <td>65.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 2015</td> <td>73.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>December 2015</td> <td>75%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>National average</td> <td>84.4%</td> </tr> </table> <p>Walsall's OFSTED inspection results, measured by this criterion, are improving but the national rate of improvement is slightly faster.</p> <p>The Board is clear that, whilst the local authority's task is couched in terms of performance in comparison to the national results, the fundamental task is about ensuring that every single child in Walsall is given the best possible chance of success through the provision of excellent education at all levels.</p> <p>In my last report I told the Partnership that the Board had also considered a very detailed report '<i>Narrowing the Gap</i>' which analyses the performance of pupils claiming Free School Meals and subject to SEN statements respectively, and by ethnicity and compared it to pupils without the particular characteristic. Whilst the report demonstrated some progress in narrowing the performance gap, particularly in relation to EYFS children on Free School Meals, it also pointed to continuing concern in relation to the relative performance of white pupils in Walsall, particularly boys.</p> <p>The consideration of performance gaps led the Board to request detailed analysis to be undertaken in relation to the relative performance of pupils with special educational needs. The outcome of this is reported in paragraph 4 below. The Board will consider the next '<i>Narrowing the Gap</i>' report in spring 2016.</p>	December 2013	65.5%	June 2015	73.3%	December 2015	75%	National average	84.4%
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4.	<p>Monitoring progress on the School Improvement Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>The Board is focussing on the achievement of critical activity to support significant improvement in the performance of Walsall schools. The Action Plan focuses on six priority areas;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure strong leadership in all Walsall schools. 2. Ensure the Local Authority improvement strategy is fit for purpose. 3. Ensure the Local Authority maintains an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the performance of all schools. 4. Ensure a robust and unambiguous approach to school categorisation, intervention and support. 5. Ensure high quality school improvement across all sectors. 6. Ensure effective school to school support across the Local Authority. <p>The Board has focussed on and discussed progress in relation to one or two priority areas at each meeting. The Board has been pleased to note some encouraging progress in key areas of the Action Plan. Some examples are;</p>								

- Development of a Walsall leadership strategy. After a slow start significant progress has been made in the development of both primary and secondary leadership strategies. A seconded secondary headteacher, more recently working with a seconded primary headteacher from a Teaching School, have worked with heads across the borough to develop a new approach to leadership development and to initiate a range of courses and activity to support senior leaders in both phases. The Board was particularly pleased to see evidence of effective cross phase working and whilst it is early days in terms of implementation the approach proposed and evident potential support from headteachers is encouraging. Funding for taking this programme of work forward is a crucial factor in success and the Board has asked senior managers to consider urgently the potential for additional funding to be identified from local authority funds, Schools' Forum funds or school reserves, where appropriate.
- A key area of the Action Plan relates to improving the availability and use of school performance data, including in year data. This has been a focus of attention for the Board given the importance of the School Improvement Team (SIT) having access to up to date information about performance in order to be able to challenge, and intervene with schools where performance is of concern. There has been significant improvement in the number of schools cooperating in submitting the data requested by the authority. In turn, the data team has been working with headteachers and other school representatives to try to ensure that all data requests are comprehensible, appropriate, and the data submission burden minimised. This is an ongoing task, as national DfE requirements are continually changing. Where academy schools are failing to provide the data requested this is being actively pursued with academy sponsors and/or the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- In my last report to the Partnership I raised the Board's concern about the instability of the arrangements around school improvement caused by the number of temporary posts and interim leadership arrangements for the School Improvement Team (SIT). This was affecting the confidence of headteachers and governors in the authority's school improvement function. Since my report (July 2015) a permanent appointment has been made to the post of Head of Service – Education Standards and Improvement, the team structure and responsibilities have been clarified and schools informed about the arrangements. Whilst there are still a significant number of interim posts in the team these are justified at this stage by the need to bring in skilled practitioners to lead on particular areas of the Action Plan.

In June 2015 the Director of Children's Services commissioned an external review of the school improvement function of the authority in order to inform the next stages of improvement. The review found

'..... strong evidence of a significant improvement in the systems, structures and procedures implemented over the past year. The senior leadership has been robust in its drive for improvement and progress is evident in each of the

six priority areas.'

The report identified six key areas where future work should focus and particularly outlined areas of insufficient progress including the development of a school leadership strategy; the definition of success criteria; data sharing and definition; and clarity re school categorisation. The Board has seen progress in several of the areas identified in the review report and is monitoring progress on the rest through the school action plan monitoring reports.

The Board has also identified areas where it considers that the pace of improvement needs to increase or where specific action is needed to ensure that school performance improves. Key issues here are;

- **The performance of Academies.** As referred to above, whilst many local authority maintained schools still have scope for improvement, the performance of Academies, and in particular sponsored Academies is a cause of concern. The Board considered this issue at its November meeting. The SIT and senior managers in the children's services department are providing robust challenge to academies and a protocol for working with Academies has been developed, aimed at ensuring that positive relationships are forged between Academies, Academy sponsors and the authority, and that sector led improvement support is available to Academies as well as maintained schools. Regular liaison is taking place with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), who has responsibility for oversight of Academies in the borough. I intend to meet with the RSC to discuss the Board's concerns in the near future.
- **Relative performance of pupils with special educational needs (SEN)**As explained above, following identification of the poor relative performance of pupils in the borough with SEN, the Board asked for detailed analysis to be carried out to identify those schools demonstrating relatively good performance and practice. Once this had been done the Board asked for a specific exercise to be undertaken to work with schools showing relatively lower performance, with a view to identifying and providing for improvement support needs. This exercise has taken much longer than the Board would have wished, but is now underway and the Board expects to receive a detailed report on the outcome in January. This will identify any resource needs and include a plan of action to address relatively poor performance through school to school and other support so that SEN pupils get the opportunities they need to achieve and excel.
- **School to school improvement**Developing a framework within which schools collaborate through improvement partnership arrangements has been a key element of the Action Plan from the outset but progress has been limited until recently. However, following the recruitment of a specialist adviser to the SIT who is working on this area in collaboration with headteachers, a school to school pilot is now underway. The Board has emphasised the importance of the pilot in identifying a sustainable framework for school to school improvement in which the local authority's crucial enabling role is clarified.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor support A great deal of work has been undertaken as part of the SIT governor support development plan which has enabled improved support to be available to governing bodies and individual school governors. However the Board is concerned about the low rate of take up of new governor induction courses despite it being at no cost to new governors. There is also a need for greater clarity about the relationship between, and the relative responsibilities of, the Walsall Governors' Association and the SIT governor support team. The Director of Children's Services is meeting with both early in the new year to pursue this important issue and the Board is to receive a report back on key governor support issues in March 2015.
5.	<p>Revised School Improvement Strategy (SIS), Action Plan and Scorecard. Following the OFSTED inspection of June 2014 the Children and Young People's Partnership developed the Walsall School Improvement Strategy. The associated Action Plan and scorecard has been the basis on which the Board has been providing challenge and monitoring the authority's progress.</p> <p>More than a year on, a great deal of the action plan has been achieved and there has been some improvement in school performance, as indicated above. But there is still much to be done to ensure that all Walsall children achieve their potential. The School Improvement Strategy has therefore been updated and revised after much consultation with the Headteachers' and Governors working group and an associated Action Plan and high level scorecard has been developed with input from the Board. The scorecard reflects the new targets outlined in the SIS which focus on a) improving the performance of schools and b) improving the performance of pupils, with the intention of reaching national average achievement levels by the dates shown in the SIS which is attached as an appendix.</p> <p>A high level version of the scorecards used by the Board to monitor performance is also attached for information. A significant proportion of the performance indicators in the more detailed versions rely for measurement on a termly survey of schools (headteachers and governors). At the moment the return rate for this survey is too small for reliable measurement of improving or declining confidence and the Board has asked that special attention is urgently given to finding ways in which the distribution and return rate of the survey can be improved.</p> <p>Next steps and Conclusion</p> <p>The Education Challenge Board has now been established for a little over twelve months. In that time it has observed significant progress in the implementation of the Action Plan which was designed to secure improvement in the performance of schools and pupils in Walsall. However if the authority is to achieve its aspirations for every Walsall child, and in particular to achieve the demanding targets set in the revised School Improvement Strategy, the current pace of progress will not just have to be maintained but increased.</p>

Whilst there is still a great deal to do there is no doubt that the leadership of the Children's Services directorate and the School Improvement Team are very committed and working hard to drive forward improvement and there is evidence that this is increasingly being recognised and responded to by Headteachers and governors.

Finally I would like to place on record my appreciation of the commitment of the members of the Education Challenge Board for their regular attendance at our meetings, their very useful contributions and their evident commitment to ensuring that all Walsall children get the educational opportunities they deserve.

The Board intends to report again on progress to the Partnership in summer 2016.

Frances Done
6th January 2016