

13th January 2015

Update on the school improvement post Ofsted action plan

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor B. Cassidy (Cabinet Member: Children and Young People)

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress following Ofsted's inspection of Local Authority School Improvement Services in June 2014. Key issues identified for improvement were as follows:

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.

The report outlines some of the key systems and protocols that have now been introduced and how these will enable progress to be robustly monitored for impact. In particular, the remit of the Education Challenge Board is outlined in appendix 1, with reference made to the role of the Independent Chair.

There is a brief summary of 2014 attainment and progress data across Walsall's schools and the current overview of Ofsted Inspection judgements compared to national figures.

A staffing update is also provided, alongside an overview of how capacity is being built by encouraging highly effective practitioners to support their peers in formal partnership arrangements between schools. The report gives examples of how external expertise is being used to complement the skills, knowledge and experience of our 'in-house' team of officers.

Reason for scrutiny:

Following the initial briefing given to Members on 9th September 2014, when the action plan was still in early draft form, it was suggested that regular updates would be provided to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

In particular, following the setting up of the Education Challenge Board and its first meeting on 5th November, it was agreed that the independent Chair be invited to a future meeting to provide a personal perspective and answer questions from Members.

Recommendation:

To note progress to date.


Consultation:

Since the inspection, there has been ongoing dialogue and consultation with a range of stakeholder groups. In particular, the following groups have been kept informed of developments and provided with opportunities to contribute towards the further shaping of the improvement priorities and action plan:

- Education Challenge Board
- Headteacher and governor working group
- School Governor Association
- Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committees
- Headteachers and Chairs of Governors
- Safeguarding Children Board
- Schools Forum
- Senior HMI - Ofsted
- Department for Education


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Report

1. Current data

1.1. Ofsted outcomes

- Compared to this time last year Ofsted Judgements of schools have seen an improving trend. In December 2013, 65.5% of Walsall schools were good or better. The current position in Walsall shows 71.2% of schools overall are good or better.
- Nationally 81.4% of Primary pupils and 71.6% of Secondary pupils attend a good or better school. This data is accurate up until the 31st August 2014. In Walsall the current up to date figures are 67.1% of Primary pupils and 57.9% of Secondary pupils attend a good or better school. This is based on unpublished data as of the 12th December 2014.
- From September 2014, two primary schools have moved from an inadequate rating (Special Measures) to Good, meaning 68.3% of Walsall primaries are now rated good or better compared to 81.5% nationally.
- 4 Secondary schools that are all sponsored Academies are currently rated as Inadequate. Based on unpublished data as of the 12th December 2014 57.9% of secondary schools are rated as Good or Better, compared to 71.6% nationally.

1.2. 2014 attainment and progress data (brief overview)

Early Years Foundation Stage (5 year olds)

- The percentage of pupils achieving a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) within Walsall has significantly improved by 7% from 46% in 2013 to 53% in 2014. National outcomes for this measure have improved by 8% this year from 52% to 60%, further widening the gap to national by one percentage point from 6% in 2013 to 7% in 2014.

Phonics

- This is the third year of the phonics screening test and the pass mark of 32/40 has remained the same since 2012. The percentage of pupils in Walsall working at the expected level has increased by 3% from 72% to 75% in 2014. This outcome is above national and has been since the test's inception in 2012.

Key Stage One (7 year olds)

- Outcomes for KS1 Level 2+ remain the same as in 2013 with reading at 89%, writing 84% and maths 91%. Nationally results for this measure have improved slightly by 1% across all three core subjects, and therefore a gap has emerged to national of 1% in reading and maths and widened to 2% in writing. Walsall outcomes however are higher than our statistical neighbours for all 3 subjects.
- The percentage of pupils achieving Level 2B+ in reading improved by 1% to 80%, in writing by 3% (to 66%) and in maths by 2% (to 77%). These improvements were matched at a national level so the 4% gap in writing and 3% gap in maths between Walsall and national are unchanged from 2013.

Key Stage Two (11 year olds)

- Outcomes for KS2 Level 4+ reading, writing and maths combined (RWM) improved in Walsall by 2% in 2014 rising from 71% to 73%. Nationally outcomes for Level 4+ for RWM combined improved by 3% to 79%, widening our gap with national to 6%.
- Two levels progress has improved slightly for reading and writing but has declined by 3% in maths. The percentage of pupils achieving two levels progress declined from 87% in 2013 to 84% in 2014, unlike national results which increased from 88% to 89%. For writing, two levels progress in Walsall improved by 2% (to 92%) reducing the gap to national (93%) to just 1%. Walsall also improved by 1% for reading two levels progress going from 88% in 2013 to 89% in 2014, but the gap to national has increased due to national results increasing by 3% to 91%.

Key Stage Four (16 year olds)

- This year has seen significant changes to the GCSE specification and how the results are then subsequently reported in the Department for Education league tables. Students' first result rather than their best result are now counted, therefore eliminating from the performance tables any improvement in grades from students re-sitting one or more of their GCSE exams. Last year Walsall closed the gap to national for 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics with 59% achieving this measure. This year we have seen an 11% decline in 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics with Walsall's proportion of pupils attaining dropping to 48%. The national performance has seen a decline of 7% from 59.2% to 52.6%.
- Students making the expected 3 Levels progress has also declined in English and maths by 4% and 10% respectively. Nationally, 3 levels of progress in English has slightly increased by 0.5% however expected progress in maths has declined by 5%.

Key Stage Five (16-19 year olds)

- Up to 2013, results for schools have shown a general improvement for average points per candidate (PpC) and average points per entry. In 2014 however, points per candidate declined 27 points to 674 but this remains higher than both statistical neighbours and the West Midlands average. This decline is in line with the national performance where results have declined by 26 points from 724 in 2013 to 699 in 2014.

2. Summary of actions to date

2.1 Ensure strong leadership in all Walsall Schools.

- First two in a series of five HMI led targeted training sessions for Heads and other senior leaders completed.
- Two recruitment campaigns undertaken to attract new governors with required skills to fill governing body vacancies.
- Governor training programme revised and enhanced offer distributed.
- School leaders updated via monthly briefings on current issues including safeguarding, pupil premium and the revised Ofsted framework.
- Weak leadership in particular schools tackled and recruitment now in place.
- Three Interim Executive Boards have replaced weak governing bodies.

2.2 Ensure the Local Authority improvement strategy is fit for purpose.

- Plans continue to be updated and refined, with measurable, data-driven success criteria recently developed.
- Assistant Director and Interim Head of Service reported to and engaged with various stakeholder groups (as outlined on page 2) to ensure accountability.
- Weekly team meetings ensure that School Improvement Advisers are held to account for performance of their schools. Executive Director in attendance on a monthly basis for additional challenge.

2.3 Ensure the Local Authority maintains an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the performance of all schools.

- Plans to collect attainment and progress data from all schools communicated to school leaders.
- Scorecard model developed to capture data and allow rigorous analysis of interim progress.
- Schools vulnerable to underachievement supported and challenged through Improvement Review meetings.
- Advice and guidance provided to schools likely to be inspected following Local Authority inspections and supported self-reviews.
- Termly reviews of the support allocated to schools to ensure it is fit for purpose.

2.4 Ensure a robust and unambiguous approach to school categorisation, intervention and support.

- Operations guide developed to outline policy and practice for School Improvement officers to ensure consistency.
- Revised support band criteria developed for primary schools, special schools and nursery schools. Support bands negotiated in face to face meetings with Headteachers and Chairs.
- Future plans formulated linked to specific support bands.
- Statutory powers used where appropriate – e.g. in the setting up of 3 Interim Executive Boards in primary schools.
- Governor training programme developed to reflect priorities in the action plan.
- Headteacher and senior leader training programme developed to strengthen leadership.

2.5 Ensure high quality school improvement across all sectors.

- School Improvement team revised structure in place to reflect service needs.
- Officer roles clarified and well qualified / experienced additional capacity sourced.
- Key staff in post and beginning to take ownership of their key responsibilities.
- Initial training events for governors and school leaders well attended and positive feedback received.

2.6 Ensure effective school to school support across the Local Authority.

- Teaching school alliances developing formal support offers to schools.
- Headteacher and governor working group extended to include National Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education, National Leaders of Governance and others with proven experience of supporting other settings.
- Support for 3 applications to the National College from Headteachers in primary, secondary and special schools for accreditation as National Leaders of Education.
- Confirmation of involvement in National College for School Leadership targeted school to school support programmes just received.

- Mapping of existing school to school support through clusters underway, alongside the development of a directory of good practice.
- Both National Leaders of Governance now Chairing Interim Executive Boards.
- School to school support offer from special schools being developed by two seconded school leaders.

3. Staffing - working differently

3.1 New appointments

- **Balwant Singh-Bains** - appointed as Head of the Virtual School (3 days per week from 3rd November) in partnership with Sandwell. Balwant will lead on all aspects of the Virtual School's work, with a particular focus on ensuring that those pupils achieve their full potential.
- **Phil Hand** – appointed as interim school governance manager (4 days per week from 17th November), pending recruitment to the permanent post in the Spring term. Phil will lead on all aspects of governance, including recruitment, training and effective clerking.
- **Nicola Hart** – appointed as Early Years / School Ready Lead Adviser (from January 2015)

3.2 Additional expertise

- Using Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) expertise to deliver five days of focused training for Headteachers and other senior leaders on specific areas within the action plan.
- Using Ofsted lead inspector expertise to conduct rigorous reviews on identified topics in identified schools.
- Using experienced colleagues from outside the borough to add capacity to the team of advisers at operational and strategic level. **Dave Smith** and **Catherine Simpson** have recently joined officers at the Education Development Centre.

3.3 Working differently

- Providing opportunities for established officers to lead on key aspects of the action plan.
- Deploying established officers creatively to meet demand.
- Focusing support and challenge to schools in inverse proportion to success, using agreed criteria.
- Identifying and quality assuring good practice in schools.
- Working with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to set up a 'school to school' support model, supported by HMI-led professional development.

4. Next steps:

- The action plan will be RAG rated in preparation for the next meeting of the Challenge Board.
- This RAG rating will be used to inform future planning and service delivery.

Appendix 1

Walsall Education Challenge Board

Overall Purpose: Governance for Walsall's School Improvement Strategy

Membership:

- Independent Chair
- Walsall Council:
 - Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
 - Main Party Opposition Lead Member
 - Director of Children's Services
 - Assistant Director Access and Achievement
 - Headteacher and Governor School Improvement Strategy Working Group representative
 - Walsall Nursery and Primary Schools Headteacher representative x 1
 - Walsall Special School Headteacher representative x 1
 - Walsall Secondary Headteacher representative x 1
 - Walsall Governors' Association x 2

Support:

- PA to Assistant Director
- QA and Performance support

Meeting Schedule:

- 5 times per year – approximately every two months in September, November, January, March/April and May/June
- Agenda to be agreed between Assistant Director in liaison with Portfolio Holder and DCS and the Independent chair

Remit:

Through its actions and communications the Walsall Education Challenge Board will monitor progress in and provide challenge for Walsall's Strategy for supporting School Improvement and its associated improvement plan. This will be achieved by:

- Monitoring the raising of standards at all key stages
- Monitoring the proportion of schools judged good and better
- 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 school improvement strategy

Additionally, the Board will:

- Examine the ways in which schools can play a full role as the key universal service in the wider partnership for children
- Review the quality and impact of services available to support and challenge schools and other settings
- Evaluate the impact of sector led improvement and research in practice on school improvement

Role of the Independent Chair:

- To keep the Board focused on the key objectives of the Walsall School Improvement Strategy and associated operational plans
- To hold officers and partners to account for the delivery and impact of their programmes
- To regularly review the progress of the strategy to support school improvement in terms of outcomes
- To ensure that brokerage and commissioning is effectively driving up forward improvement activity and impact
- To represent the board to all stakeholders as appropriate.

Reporting:

To the Children and Young People's Partnership Board

Links with:

Headteacher Associations, Walsall Governor Association, Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committees, Children and the Young People Scrutiny Panel, Regional Schools Commissioner, Academy Sponsors