

**Councillor Towe**  
**Portfolio Holder - Education and Skills**

The Directorate has three service areas, Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding, Early Help & Commissioning and Access & Inclusion. As Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills, my report details those activities within Access and Inclusion we are most proud of, the challenges we face and the areas upon which we are focussing attention to ensure better educational outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most exams and assessments did not take place in the 2019/20, or 2020/21 academic years. The government also announced that it would not publish school or college level results data on [Compare school and college performance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/comparing-school-and-college-performance) (also commonly referred to as school and college performance tables) in autumn 2020 or autumn 2021, and that this data would not be used to hold schools and colleges to account. They have also made clear that results data from 2020/21 will not be used in school and college level performance measures in future years. This report has to refer to the latest 2019 attainment outcomes and associated benchmarking data, in line with this guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-performance-measures/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-accountability>

**1. What do we know?**

There are 130 educational settings in Walsall.

7 Special Schools	8 Nursery Schools	85 Primary Schools	18 Secondary Schools
1 All through School	3 Pupil Referral Units	1 College	7 Independent Schools

As of September 2021, 81.8% (99) of Walsall schools have an Ofsted published grade of good or better compared to 80.2% in September 2020 and 79.3% in September 2019 and compared to 86.4% nationally.

LA maintained schools graded good or better is 89.2%, academy converters is 73.7% and academy sponsor led schools is 57.9%

Just to mention, Ofsted’s return to inspection in 2021 happened in phases, with no graded inspections for education or social care providers planned before the summer term. For maintained schools and academies, from January, they resumed monitoring inspections of schools judged inadequate at their previous inspection and some schools graded as requires improvement. Emergency inspections of schools continued as they had done throughout the pandemic, in response to any serious concerns raised with Ofsted, we had no emergency inspections in Walsall. Routine inspections, which resulted in a school being awarded a new grade or being confirmed in its current grade, resumed in the summer term. Full inspections then continued from September 2021.

**Walsall’s school children have more economic, language and health challenges than regional, national and statistical neighbours:**

- 31.6% of Primary School children and 27.5% of Secondary School pupils are in receipt of Free School Meals an increase from the previous year.
- 24.9% of Primary School pupils and 21.1% of Secondary school pupils have English as an additional language.
- 27.2% of Reception aged pupils and 44.4% of year 6 pupils are overweight.

**In general, the outcomes for children at the end of Primary School show some improvement - progress in Writing has improved and is better than statistical neighbours, and although a slight decline from 2018 progress in Maths remains higher than the national average:**

- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Reading, Writing and Maths remains at 61.0% in 2019 - no change from 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Maths has increased by 3% from 74% in 2018 to 77% in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Reading has increased by 2% points from 72% in 2018 to 70% in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Writing is 77% in 2019 – the same as in 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020

**Improvements in outcomes at key stage 4 are smaller and remain below national and regional averages:**

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 have become the chief measures of schools' performance, replacing the old 5 A\*-C GCSEs including English and Maths measure. They are based on students' attainment in their best eight subjects at GCSE and the progress made from the end of Year 6, when the Key Stage 2 SATs in Reading and Maths are taken.

- The average Attainment 8 score in 2020 is 47.4 an improvement from 44.0 in 2019.
- The average Progress 8 score in 2019 is -0.11 an improvement from -0.19 in 2018. This is now above statistical neighbours. 2020 data not published yet, expected November 2021.
- 64.9% of pupils achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths in 2020 compared with 58.0% in 2019.

**The proportion of children who are identified as having special educational needs is lower than national and regional averages and their outcomes are improving:**

- In 2021, 15.2% of pupils have a special educational need (SEN support or EHCP) compared with 15.9% nationally.
- 18.0% of children with SEN Support achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths compared with 25.0% nationally. This shows an improvement of 3% from 2018 and the gap to national has narrowed to from 9% in 2018 to a 7% gap in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- 10.0% of children with an EHCP achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths. This is slightly higher than the national average of 9%. This shows an improvement of 4% from 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- At KS4 the average progress 8 score for children with SEN Support continues to improve year on year and is now -0.46, an improvement of 0.12 and better than statistical neighbours. 2020 data not published yet, expected November 2021.

**Poorer and disadvantaged pupils perform worse than their counterparts elsewhere do but the attainment gap compared to their peers is closing:**

- 44.0% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading Writing and Maths in 2019 compared with 47.0% nationally. The percentage gap from those who are not eligible for FSM has closed by 2% to 23%. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- There is no change from 2018 outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. 49.0% achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths in 2019 compared to 51% nationally.

Compared with non-disadvantaged pupils in Walsall the gap remains at 21%. This is 1% below the national gap of 20.0%. Indicator cancelled for 2020.

- At KS4, the average Attainment 8 score for those pupils eligible for Free School Meals is 38.7 in 2020 with a gap of 11.3 compared with those who are not eligible for free school meals.
- The average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils in Walsall is 39.5 in 2020 with a gap of 12.3 compared to non-disadvantaged pupils. This is better than the national gap of 13.5.

## 2. Introduction

Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's young people.

Our **Walsall Right for Children** vision sets out our ambition of the broad view of the role of Schools in their immediate community, in Walsall as a whole and beyond and with the aim to meet the needs of the whole child. That is:



In the Children's Services Directorate, the Access and Inclusion service will deliver the Walsall Right for Children vision through two distinct strategies:

- The Access Strategy- this outlines how we ensure we have sufficient school places to match the needs of our children and how children will access them.
- The Inclusion Strategy- this outlines how we ensure the quality of provision that our children and young people receive, and how and when we will support, challenge and intervene when necessary.

## 3. Achievements and challenges

We focused at the beginning of the year on developing our SEND and Accessibility Strategy linked to our Inclusion Strategy. This sets out the vision, priorities and aims to ensure a step change in improved outcomes for all children and young people with SEND.

This was important as one of the emerging concerns which has arisen from the pandemic is the higher rate and prevalence of recognised anxiety and social, emotional health concerns amongst our children and young people.

We have been allocated funding centrally from the DfE to support the initial Wellbeing for Educational Return in September 2020 and this funding has been extended further to include the coming Autumn and Spring terms. Our Educational Psychologist team as well as our safeguarding lead and school nursing team are working in partnership with our school SENDCos and Dedicated Safeguarding Leads in providing a package of support and training directly to schools and to children and young people. Social, emotional health and autism are two of the increasing needs which are emerging for our children and young people.

### 3.1 Summary of projects and initiatives during the pandemic

The working relationship between the LA and Schools has never been stronger. I see this in the weekly Head Teachers Meeting and the regular School Governor Support Sessions, all of which I have attended. The reasons for this are multi-faceted. This includes the swiftness we

have responded and adapted to circumstances created by the pandemic, rather than a “this is the way it’s always been done” approach. This has fostered a sense of sharing and bringing down of barriers that may have pre-existed.

Below is an overview of the key work and activity from each team in Access and Inclusion during this time.

### **3.2 The work of The Virtual School**

The Virtual School plays a strategic role in ensuring we meet our corporate parenting responsibilities with regard to improving the educational outcomes of children in care. The Virtual School work alongside professionals who work directly with children in care and care leavers to develop and improve joint working and raise educational outcomes. The Virtual School work with schools, colleges, universities, nurseries, children's social care, health professionals and report to the Corporate Parenting Board.

As all children returned to school, the staff at The Virtual School were welcomed back into schools to provide face to face support to children in care. Our tutors, mentors and key workers were able to provide additional support in the classroom to help children catch-up from any lost learning.

In addition to the support provided by virtual school staff over 50 children and young people received extra 1:1 tuition provided by external tuition companies. We also continued to provide additional online tuition through our own learning platforms.

We delivered a number of learning and enrichment programs to help children return to school, such as our ‘Summit2Success’ programme which was a 9 week programme to help children build confidence, resilience and self-esteem and our 4 week English for Speakers of other Languages group course which supported young people new to the UK and Walsall.

We continued to provide learning resources i.e. laptops and tablets to children who were new into care or did not have the equipment for home learning and support parents/carers with home learning.

#### **Children with a social worker:**

In June 2021 the DfE announced that from September 2021 the role of the Virtual School Head would be extended to take a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker not just children in care.

Virtual School Heads have been asked to make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, promote practice that supports children’s engagement in education and to level up children’s outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child with a social worker can reach their potential. This includes making sure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Grant funding has been provided to help the Virtual School Head deliver the extended duties. The funding formula for the grant is based on the number of schools in each local authority, not children with a social worker. Walsall’s grant is £100,000. The virtual school will take on two additional staff to help with the additional responsibilities.

### **3.3 The work of the Access Teams**

#### **Education Welfare & Attendance**

To support schools the Education Welfare Service (EWS) issued simplified guidance highlighting the key points raised in DfE issued guidance to schools throughout COVID-19.

The EWS initiated the daily collection, monitoring and recording of pupil attendance at Schools for vulnerable pupils and those pupils of key worker parents from all Walsall Schools. This data was initially required twice daily for the monitoring conversations held between ourselves and the Department for Education. We continued to monitor pupil attendance from September and in line with the government guidance, are able to issue fines where requested to do so by schools

### **School Admissions and Appeals: Phased Admissions (Primary and Secondary)**

The service continued with post offer day activity for the Secondary School Admission round and ensured that the offer of reception class places could still be made to parents as planned on national offer day on 16 April 2021.

### **Exclusions**

We acted swiftly to confirm the LA's position with regards to exclusions and need for Schools to retain 'excluded' pupils and those pupils that were on the 'cusp of exclusion' on roll at their existing School during this unprecedented period. This process ensured that there was clarity about LA/School responsibility for undertaking monitoring and safeguarding checks for these students.

### **Appeals**

School Appeal Hearings were initially suspended but re-commenced on 01 June 2020. The regulations, currently in place until September 2022, allow appeal hearings to be held remotely, via video and/or telephone link or for the appeal to be determined based on a written submission in line with current social distancing requirements.

### **Elective Home Education**

During the Covid-19 period the service area maintained communications with the Elective Home Education Community in the Borough through calls and emails on a regular basis. Requests for parents to provide their annual reports and plans electronically to demonstrate they are providing a suitable education continued in the absence of undertaking home visits. Between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 261 Children and Young People (CYP) have become Electively Home Educated. The majority of these new registrations (68.1%, 178) have been made during the months of September to December 2020, with 98 in September, 38 in October, 22 in November and 20 in December. This is an increase on 2019.

In support of changing demographics and the need for more school places, the council has undertaken a number of school expansion capital projects over the last few years.

### **Capital projects**

Recent projects that have been or are about to be completed include:

- Oakwood Special School – internal remodelling of parts of the Education Development Centre to increase the number of places by a further 30
- Castle Business & Enterprise College – 3 class block modular classroom
- Mary Elliot School – internal remodelling to create 30 additional places
- Manor Primary school – 2 classrooms, toilets, relocation of MUGA
- Rosedale Primary School – 3 class block extension
- Short Heath junior School – 4 class block modular classroom for completion in December 2021.
- St Michaels Primary School – 2 classrooms, hall extension
- Christ Church Primary School – 4 classrooms extension on programme with completion due by November 2021, mobile classrooms will remain in place until all works completed.

- Relocation of the New Leaf PRU to the Spindle Tree/Stroud Avenue site

All projects are within timeframe and budget.

### **3.4 Work of the Inclusion Team**

One of the key successes for our school improvement team over the pandemic has been the on-going support for our Inadequate Ofsted graded schools. At the start of March 2020 there were four schools with an Inadequate Ofsted grading in Walsall. Of those four, three were maintained schools and one was an academy. Since the start of the return to full Section 5 inspections at the start of 2021 all four of Walsall's Inadequate Ofsted graded schools were inspected.

- New Leaf Short Stay PRU improved and was graded RI with elements of Good.
- Jane Lane improved was graded to be RI overall and was Good in all but one area.
- St Bernadette's Primary were graded as Good in all areas
- All Saints National Academy were found not to be taking effective action and remain Inadequate.

A core pieces of focused school improvement work is RADY (Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters). The local and national concerns about the attainment gaps increasing for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners is a key focus of our working moving forward. We have also supported all schools and setting, in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation, with a number of free online module training sessions. These have focused on Metacognition (awareness and recognition of one's own thought process), Learning Behaviors and SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) in the mainstream setting. The first tranche of our work was launched in the Summer Term whilst the second phase was launched in the Autumn Term.

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to closely work with all schools and settings. Although academies are not generally part of our school improvement dedicated work, we have offered opportunities to be part of our projects and support through this time.

We have produced biweekly bulletins with key updates, links and information. We have also had weekly remote meetings to which all Head Teachers and Principals are invited where we work in close partnership with our Walsall Public health colleagues to provide essential information about Covid 19 and about Childrens Services working. All of these sessions are recorded for future reference.

Officers also have weekly meetings with colleagues from the DfE remotely to support, monitor and measure our schools and settings throughout Covid and in particular where there have been national lockdowns. These meetings are known as DfE REACT meetings and there are standing national agenda items as well as regional and local items and themes.

We continue to address the SEND Written Statement of Action which was as a result of the Ofsted inspection in January 2019. Work has continued to progress in key areas however due to the pandemic certain identified actions have had to pause. We have not been able to measure the impact on improving outcomes for SEN pupils similarly to that of all learners.

The team have worked exceptionally hard to support schools, pupils, parents and carers throughout the pandemic given the constraints of lockdown and Covid 19 restrictions. Virtual visits and remote access has enable much of the work to continue but everyone is trying to conduct face to face assessments and visits where it safe to do so.

We had a dedicated Special Schools Inclusion Manager who met with all special schools and PRUs during this time to support our most vulnerable learners. Key links and messages particularly around the daily management during the pandemic were given via the Special

Schools Inclusion Manager and schools have told us that they valued this direct support.

We continue to address the EHCP timeliness and backlog as identified in the Written Statement of Action. Due to the pandemic and lockdowns there has been disruption to Annual Reviews which are led by schools. We have seen an increase in requests to assess pupils and the numbers of EHCPs for CYP in Walsall has also increased significantly. To manage this we have increased the number of SEN case workers and officers to manage the increased work load.

One significant development as identified in the Written Statement of Action is the development of our new and improved Local Offer, which is available for all services and users. The Local Offer also signposts parents, carers and CYP to our SENDIASS service which is provided by Family Action.

#### **4. Next Steps**

Within Access and Inclusion we have identified the following priorities for the year ahead:-

- Review the Specialist Provision across the whole Borough to ensure that there are the right pupils in the right provision and at the right time in line with our Walsall Right for Children vision.
- Ensure all schools provide a graduated approach to SEND in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice (2014), to ensure timely and needs led support with a focus on promoting independence and inclusion.
- Improve access and achievement of the vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.
- Attendance and behaviour within our schools continues to be a key priority area.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, inclusive, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's young people.

Realising our collective ambition for children relies on us all, whoever we are, and in whatever role we fulfil - Elected Members, Schools, Health colleagues, Employees, Parents, Carer or Community Members, acting as Champions for all children.

This report has set out the achievements Children's Services are proud of, the challenges faced by the Directorate and where attention is being focussed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families going forward. Undoubtedly, the circumstances in which the Directorate is operating will continue to be challenging and there is more to do. There is an absolute determination across Children's Services and this Administration to improve outcomes for all children and young people and to make a difference to the lives of those children who need it most.

#### **Skills**

##### **Walsall Works**

Since its inception in 2012, the award winning **Walsall Works** programme has supported its residents, particularly young people aged 16-24 years, to improve their skills base through access to functional skills, upskilling in the workforce, apprenticeships and retraining.

- People accessing funded and non-funded Apprenticeships – 1046
- People supported into training or traineeships – 1483
- People supported into employment – 2062

Despite restrictions in relation to Covid-19 and limited face to face engagement, the programme has still been able to maintain delivery in some partner venues alongside a calendar of virtual skills roadshows, a face to face expo, and continue to job match employer vacancies with local people in sectors such as construction, health and social care, hospitality and logistical roles. The team have used all virtual communication methods and social media platforms, [www.walsallworks.com](http://www.walsallworks.com) and weekly bulletin to promote a range of training and employment vacancies.

## BC Impact

Walsall Council together with the other Black Country Local Authorities Dudley, Sandwell, and Wolverhampton, have been delivering this programme since July 2016 (funded by European Social Fund / Youth Employment Initiative (ESF/YEI)). The project is targeted at getting 16-29 year old NEETs engaging with positive activities such as education, employment and training. The programme which provides non statutory support and guidance is currently due to end in July 2023.

The programme provides personalised, joined up provision of local services to support young people who are unemployed, inactive and at risk of social inclusion to overcome barriers to participation and enter sustainable employment. Referrals are received from a multitude of sources i.e. education and training providers, Health Services, Families, Voluntary Community Services, Police, Probation and local authority teams such as Locality hubs, Youth Justice, Teenage Parents, Transitional Leaving Care.

Despite the difficult operating environment with the pandemic, the project continued to offer a hybrid delivery mode with most of our participant interactions delivered remotely. However, arrangements were in place to support the most vulnerable young people face to face in partner venues or home visits if required.

## Impact Hub

The **Impact** Hub in the Crossings at St Pauls Walsall, is a drop-in facility and this has become a focal point for young people to seek support. Advisors are available daily Monday to Friday. Due to the effects of the pandemic we envisage NEETs and levels of unemployment to remain high in the borough. The Hub is a vital resource for the community to seek support.

## Impact data table:

Impact Programme	Enrolments	Interventions	Outcomes
16-29 year olds (total)	4436	2461	1328
16-25 year olds (total)	3755	2119	1170

## Kickstart

This national **Kickstart** scheme pledged to create 250,000 high quality paid 6-month work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming a Universal Credit benefit and are at risk of long term unemployment. Walsall Council's Employment & Skills team are an authorised Gateway organisation for the new DWP Kickstart scheme and aim to bring forward 150 pledged placements from over 70 local employers, with 70 live placements with:

## Careers Enterprise Company

Funding from the **Careers Enterprise Company** has been secured to build additional capacity in the existing Employment and Skills team to work with disadvantaged, vulnerable and hard to reach young people pre-16 and post 16 who are identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. A high percentage of the target group may not have attended school this past year

and therefore will have missed out on vital education and careers guidance. Young people identified at risk will be supported through targeted one-to-one contact and face to face interventions delivered by a qualified Careers Advice and Guidance practitioner.

The project will focus on those young people in year 11 and year 13 during the summer period to ensure a smooth transition back into post 16 provisions. The additional capacity has allowed work to begin and reach out to young people who are elective home educated (EHE), not registered with education in Walsall as children missing education (CME). The overall aim is to ensure that we are able to support young people back into education settings.

### **Youth Unemployment**

The pandemic has seen a greater rise in the volume of **young benefit claimants** in Walsall with 2,555 claimants aged 16-24 in September 2021 in comparison to 1,925 claimants in March 2020. The number of 16-17 remains at approx 35 claimants, with 1,495 claimants being aged 18-21 years old. 60% of young claimants were male.



Councillor Chris Towe  
Cabinet Member Education and Skills  
20<sup>th</sup> October 2021