

BRIEFING NOTE

Agenda item no. 8

TO: Children's & Young People Scrutiny & Performance Panel

DATE: 19 July 2011

RE: The Primary Strategy

Purpose

To inform Scrutiny Panel about The Primary Strategy.

Introduction

In light of current government legislation the strategy outlines how schools will, with new roles and responsibilities, and greater autonomy and accountability, contribute to ensure that every learner in Walsall is provided with the best opportunities for learning.

It closely aligns the vision and priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan, Sustainable Communities Plan and the Children and Young Peoples Plan.

To address and promote the need for high aspirations and high expectations of our learners the strategy stresses the need for working closely with families and other service providers.

This co-ordination of services will ensure better outcomes for our communities and a more effective use of resources in line with working smarter principles. The strong link with regeneration activities will support families and help address child poverty and early identification of those children vulnerable to under achievement.

The role of governors to support and challenge schools has been made very clear and the strategy will support the principles and practices that contribute to outstanding governance.

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State, notified all local authorities in March 2011 that all primary schools would need to reach a minimum standard and that under achievement was to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The benchmark for Primary schools nationally is now 60% of children to achieve Level 4 combined English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and median levels of 87% in English and 86% in mathematics for two levels of progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2.

Schools falling below these floor targets have robust plans, which will be approved by the department, to address the underperformance; these plans are already in place and are being regularly reviewed and monitored by the local authority.

Key priorities within the strategy

1. Improve and sustain the overall attainment of schools.
2. Narrow the achievement gap for individuals and groups of children who are vulnerable to underachievement.
3. Improve the quality of teaching and learning.
4. Secure good and outstanding leadership in schools.
5. Improve attendance and behaviour for learning.
6. Promote the development of a relevant, challenging and motivating curriculum.
7. Promote school to school support across the borough and beyond.
8. Share good and developing practice effectively to accelerate improvements.
9. Co-ordinate service provision and promote integrated service delivery.
10. Increase the proportion of schools that attain a good or better overall Ofsted judgement.

What we will do

1. Facilitate collaboration and school improvement between schools.
2. Provide high quality traded services.
3. Provide advice and guidance to governing bodies.
4. Provide a local contact officer for each school to provide targeted early intervention and support to children and their families.
5. Encourage community engagement, responding to local innovation and need through CAPs, Area Partnerships, IYPSS (Integrated Young People's Support Service) and Children's Centres.
6. Support the whole child through aligning/targeting support to schools from services including leisure, health and regeneration.
7. Provide core School Improvement including intervention where necessary.
8. Statutory duties including SEN, transport, raising of the participation age.

Joint vision and joint leadership has underpinned our work with schools. Some of these activities include:

- Supported Self-Review (SSR)
- Partnership Review Groups (PRGs)

The underlying principle has been joint responsibility and the holding of the school and the local authority to account. This includes clear joint scrutiny of the impact of interventions that have been implemented, so that developing capacity in our schools to be self-evaluating and to be able to drive sustainable improvement, remains at the core of our approach.

The focus on narrowing/eliminating the gaps in attainment for children and young people that are vulnerable to underachievement is at the centre of what we do collaboratively sub regionally and locally through the Black Country LEP and our Walsall Child Poverty Strategy.

How will we do it

1. Use a range of data and intelligence (actual and predictions) to support early identification.
2. Use the school's self-evaluation and school's development plan as the key documents and develop them to form 'recovery plans' where necessary.
3. Identify support requirements and broker support from other school leaders, National Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education and from the teaching school or from the LA team.
4. Provide School Self Reviews (SSR) in partnership with school leaders to review impact and quality.
5. Set up Progress Review Groups (PRG) as the key forum to hold schools and partners to account and broker future support.
6. To consider with Governing Bodies and headteachers where collaborative arrangements with successful schools under formal or informal arrangements could bring additional capacity, including through federation and other structural solutions.
7. Work closely with Governing Bodies to increase and develop their capacity to add support and challenge to schools through training and support.
8. Where schools are not making sufficient progress the LA will use statutory powers as required.

The changing role of the local authority will demand a good knowledge of current school performance. In an increasingly diverse school provision this will rely on schools sharing high quality school intelligence, including data, with the local authority.

The local authority will play a key role in facilitating the sharing of good practice and feed-back on the attainment of groups who are vulnerable to under achievement.

The local authority will work closely with the Council's Area Partnership development to provide coherent support to neighbourhoods and their priorities, encouraging family learning opportunities.

The Area Partnership Managers and school improvement teams will work closely together to provide timely and effective early intervention and support to the schools and their families.

Close relationships and partnerships with Children Centres and Sure Start Centres will provide a firm foundation for further improvements. Early intervention and support for those youngsters vulnerable to underachievement will be a major focus for both schools and the local authority in order to close the achievement gap.

Recommendations

If required, a presentation to Scrutiny on the full Strategy can be provided in the Autumn.

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