

## Cabinet Member Briefing - The Education and Skills portfolio



### Introduction

#### 'Our Council Plan' – Priorities

The Children's 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. It also identifies the activities of Skills and Employability that sits within my portfolio and is part of Regeneration and Economy Directorate.

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.

This aligns to our corporate aim to reduce inequalities and make the most of potential, by enabling our children to fulfil their potential and thrive. It supports our key area of focus that our children should: have the best possible start, be safe from harm and be happy, healthy and learning well.

The work within this directorate will also ensure we meet our Walsall 2040 aims. Many of those who will become adults in 2040 have just been born. We need to create strong prospects for their future, a thriving borough with opportunities for play, education and access to good jobs. We want to create a Walsall where all children, irrespective of background or ability, have access to good education and can lead fun, safe and healthy lives. We want to ensure services are there now and, in the future, to support children and families and that they can access a range of activities to have fun, grow, learn, and thrive locally. Resilient children and thriving families are key to ensure Walsall's children can achieve their potential become successful adults from 2040 and beyond.

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### Our Service Delivery

Ofsted outcomes continue to improve, and at a faster rate than national. As of 19th July 2023 89.3% of schools were Good or Outstanding compared with 86.2% in the West Midlands and 88.5% nationally. 88.2% of learners attended Good or Outstanding schools compared with 85.9% in the West Midlands and 88.1% nationally. Attainment outcomes for our children in Early Years have improved from 2022 and closed the gap to national by 2.9%. Key stage (KS) 1 and 2 show an improvement in writing and maths in line with National trends. Reading in KS2 has declined slightly but all subjects have seen the gap to national close this year. Outcomes at KS 4 and 5 show a decline on 2022 results, as reflected in national picture, but generally improvement in KS4 from 2019. National data is not yet available.

In June 2022, Ofsted and CQC reinspected the Local Area SEND provision. We made sufficient progress against seven of the nine areas of concern from the 2019 inspection. The two areas for further improvement are EHCP's and the Local Offer. We have an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) with the DfE and to date key progress has been made:- the quality and timeliness of EHCPs is improving (even though EHCP requests are increasing from 940 in 2022 to 810 so far for 2023, in 2022 9% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks, so far for 2023 this is 43.3 %, for comparison, national was 50.7% in 2022 and is currently 49.1%, a new Local Offer is also progressing and a Local Offer Co-ordinator has been employed to help lead the work to completion. In April 2023 the DfE and CQC monitored our APP progress and stated 'It was clear that the local area is making sustainable improvements to SEND services and to the lives of children and young people. The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to accelerate improvement.

Walsall Works service focuses on reducing the number of young people who are not in education employment or training (NEET). NEETs are currently at 2.8% (July 2023) compared to 3.6% in 2022.



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## Our Strategies

Our **Walsall Right for Children** vision sets out our ambition of the broad view of the role of Schools. That is: The right children, in the right place, at the right time, for the right amount of time. Access and Inclusion deliver the Walsall Right for Children vision through the development of 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.

**Walsall Families of Schools** has been developed with schools and is the vision for how, as a partnership, we will sustain and enhance high quality education provision across the Borough by ensuring no school stands alone as an isolated provision, either through federations or Multi academy trusts. We now have 64 schools in a family, 31 federated and 43 in an academy trust.

**Walsall learning Alliance** has been developed and is a strategic board consisting of leaders from the education system in Walsall. It has a drive to achieve excellence through equity in models of school-led improvement. The purpose of the alliance is 'Improving the education and wellbeing of children through collective accountability. We have an agreed focus to improve SEND outcomes, reduce exclusions and improve Early Years.

## Our Projects

The DfE have categorised Walsall as a Priority Education Improvement Area. A local board has been set up to improve attainment at both KS2 and KS4. The Board will help identify a range of interventions and support delivery in schools over the next 2 years.

Despite demand on school places, for Primary admissions every applicant received an offer of a school place for September 2023. Of those, 92.3% received their first preference, 3.98% their second preference and 1.17% their third preference. For Secondary admissions, despite a growth of 93 applications from last year's figure, 79.2% received their first preference, 10.2% their second preference and 3.5% their third preference.

Our Inclusion hub continues to develop. We appointed staff to work with social workers, schools and LA officers to help make visible the disadvantages children with a social worker can experience and promote practice that supports their engagement in education. We employed SEN Casework Officer to sit with the SEN Assessment Team to work directly with looked after children and young people who have an EHCP or are undergoing a SEN needs assessment. And more recently we appointed a further SEN Education Support Officer to work with children and young people on SEN Support to ensure they are going through the graduated approach in a timely manner. We have also extended the remit of the Inclusion Hub to promote the education of children under the Youth Justice Service. During the 2022/23 academic year the team have dealt with 348 referrals from social workers, schools and other professionals. This is an increase of 81 referrals from the previous academic year. The complexity of the referrals has also increased.

In addition to the work carried out to improve educational outcomes for children with a social worker, the staff in the Inclusion Hub are also challenging schools where children with an EHCP are at risk of permanent exclusion. 31 children with SEND needs, and at risk of exclusion, were referred to the hub. Of these only 2 went on to be excluded.



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### Future works

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

- Review the Specialist Provision across the whole Borough to ensure the right pupils are 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.
- Accelerated Action Plan (APP) to be developed and implemented in response to the Revisit of the Local Area and in preparation for new SEND and AP Area Inspections.
- Improving outcomes at Early Years to give children best start in their education life.
- Development of the Alternative Provision (AP) framework including commissioning and quality assurance.
- Attendance and exclusions within our schools continues to be a key priority area.
- Further development of the Inclusion Hub to include support and challenge inclusion framework for schools and settings.

### Thank you

I would like to thank all our schools and settings for the tremendous work they do with our children. The improved outcomes reflect their commitment to ensure our children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well. 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 our children.



Councillor Mark Statham  
Signed

Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills