

# **Minutes of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Walsall Council House**

**Thursday, 11 January at 6.00 PM**

## **Committee Members present:**

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)  
Councillor P. Kaur (Vice Chair)  
Councillor S. Hussain  
Councillor I. Hussain  
Councillor E. Morgan  
Councillor L. Rattigan

## **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor M. Statham – Education

## **Officers Present:**

S. Kelly – Director (Access and Inclusion)  
R. Thomas – Head of Access  
L. Thompson – Head of Virtual School  
N. Perks – Quality Assurance Team Manager  
N. Gough – Democratic Services Officer

The Chair gave welcome and introductions paying testament to the outgoing Chair.

38. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Towe and Clair Pruden.

39. **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions.

40. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

41. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

42. **Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 21 November 2023 were submitted [annexed].

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.**

43. **School Attainment data**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Quality Assurance Team Manager highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed that the report provided an overview of the key stage attainment results for 2023 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Progress had been made in Walsall in reducing the gap to national. The year 1 phonics test was described, and it was noted that Walsall's data indicated that the gap between Walsall and national performance had widened from 2 percentage points in 2022 to 4 percentage points in 2023. Members were assured that this was an area of focus for the service, and reviews had been commissioned in the lowest performing schools.

The Committee was informed that in September 2023 there had been a return to pre-pandemic grading. Although the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or higher in English and Maths reduced in 2023 in Walsall, levels were still above pre-pandemic levels and data was also comparable at national level.

Members challenged if good practice, of those schools performing better in relation to phonics, was being shared with those not performing so well.

Officers confirmed that this was the case – Members were informed that all schools had been ranked to offer targeted supported and focus visits to those that needed it. The Director gave an overview of priority areas, which included a focus on raising the attainment at key stage 2 with a target on phonics and early language.

The Committee congratulated the team, pupils, and staff for the hard work in raising results.

In response to questions from the Committee, Officers confirmed that the key area for focus based on the data was phonics and early reading (which was also a key area for Ofsted). In part this would be improved through school improvement partners and school clusters. Members questioned if there were phonics resources made available to Parents, Officers clarified that the best source of information would be the school and engaging the child in reading at home. The Portfolio Holder stated that the interaction between the teacher and the pupil was vital to mastering phonics, and this was why performance had been affected by the pandemic.

Further to this discussion, Members acknowledged that parents may not have a high level of literacy and questioned if there was support in place for them to enable the child to be supported at home. The Director explained that parents often learnt alongside their children – for example when schools ran phonics sessions. There were also adult education programmes and development programmes ran by children’s services – programmes aimed at Fathers were described.

### **Resolved**

**That the committee noted the provisional results available this year and the progress made in reducing the gap to national.**

#### **44. Ofsted Data and Outcomes**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Quality Assurance Team Manager highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed that the report provided the latest Ofsted data for Walsall Local Authority and compared it with the national average over time. This shows the improvement journey the Authority had been on.

The Quality Assurance Team Manager described the types of Ofsted inspections to the Committee, alongside the performance of schools in Walsall which was now at national average.

A Member questioned what was being done in Walsall to improve attendance rates, and Officers stated that an update report would be considered by the Committee in February – this would provide an in-depth response on the issue.

The Portfolio Holder stressed that the team worked hard, and although the results might not be evident yet, the improvement of Ofsted ratings was an ongoing trend.

**Resolved**

**That the Committee noted Walsall's Ofsted position and the progress made in reducing the gap to national.**

**45. Schools causing concern**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Quality Assurance Team Manager highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed that the report provided an overview of the statutory duties that the local authority must undertake as part of the DfE 'Schools Causing Concern' (SCC) statutory guidance, together with the authorities own local protocols.

The Quality Assurance Team Manager explained that the process was managed and devised by the Authority, and where necessary school improvement plans were put in place.

In response to a question from a Member, Officers explained that if a school was rated as required 'improvement' or 'Inadequate' by Ofsted it would be categorised as 'red' which was of high concern to the Local Authority. It was noted that most schools rated as 'red' were due to Ofsted inspection outcomes. If a school was rated as 'red' it would be supported to become part of a federation – this model had been proven to work to improve standards.

**Resolved**

**That the committee noted the effectiveness of the Schools Causing Concern protocols and recognised the improvement journey schools in Walsall have been on.**

**46. Recommendation Tracker**

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

[Annexed]

**Resolved:**

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

**49. Areas of Focus**

**Resolved that:**

The Areas of Focus be noted.

50. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is scheduled for 15 February 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 19:10.

Signed:

Date: