

Councillor Statham
Portfolio Holder - Education and Skills

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.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, primary school assessments did not take place in the 2019/20, or 2020/21 academic years and at secondary schools, exams did not take place and instead interim arrangements were put in place for the awarding of end of KS4 GCSE exams. The DfE has updated the accountability guidance which can be accessed here [School and college accountability approach: 2020 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-college-accountability-approach-2020-to-2022).

As before the pandemic, 2022 performance data, will be used by schools, academy trusts, local authorities and others for improvement purposes and by Ofsted to inform inspections. At the time of this report provisional KS2 outcomes for 2022 were published in July. The latest data release for KS4 is currently for 2021. This report refers to these latest attainment outcomes and the associated benchmarking data currently available.

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 August 2022, 85.7% (102) of Walsall schools have an Ofsted published grade of good or better compared to 87.6% nationally.

91.4% of LA maintained schools, 84.2% of academy converters and 63.2% of academy sponsor led schools are graded good or better

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:

- 33.1% of Primary School children and 30.2% of Secondary School pupils are in receipt of Free School Meals an increase from the previous year.
- 25.6% of Primary School pupils and 20.5% of Secondary school pupils have English as an additional language.
- 27.2% of Reception aged pupils and 44.5% of year 6 pupils are overweight.

Due to the cancellation of the KS2 2020 and 2021 assessments, 2022 data is compared to 2019. Based on the July 2022 provisional dataset, KS2 outcomes for children at the end of Primary School show a decline in Writing and maths in line with National trends, although Reading has improved slightly:

- Based on provisional data for Walsall LA, 56% of pupils met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, down from 61% in 2019. (-5%). Nationally 59% of pupils met the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths, down from 65% in 2019. (-6%)
- The attainment gap between Walsall and the national result has narrowed from four percentage points in 2019 to three percentage points in 2022.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading is 72%, up two percentage points from 70% in 2019 compared to national which has increased by one percentage point from 73% to 74%.
- Provisional data shows that attainment at the expected standard in Writing has fallen by eleven percentage points from 77% in 2019 to 66% in 2022, compared to national which has also declined from 78% in 2019 to 69% in 2022.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in Maths has declined by nine percentage points from 77% in 2019 to 68% in 2022, compared to national which has declined by eight percentage points from 79% to 71%

The summer exam series was cancelled in both 2020 and 2021, and alternative processes set up to award grades. As the method to award grades was different in 2020 and 2021, any comparisons for both years should be made with caution as any increase in statistics likely reflects the changed method for awarding grades rather than demonstrating an improvement in standards.

Improvements across headline measures in key stage 4 and key stage 5:

Provisional 2022 Key Stage 4 Results:

Due to the pandemic, for the past two years pupils have been awarded their key stage 4 results by their teachers. During these years we have seen an increase in key stage 4 attainment outcomes.

In 2022, pupils returned to exams. In the interest of fairness, Ofqual decided to make 2022 a transition year as the 2022 key stage 4 pupils still had disruptions to their education following a period of pandemic recovery. Therefore, in 2022, grading has been moved to a point midway between 2021 and 2019 (the last time pupils sat formal exams).

Based on the provisional results received directly from schools on results day (25th August 2022), the 2022 headline results for Walsall are as follows. Please note, these figures are highly provisional and likely to change:

- Attainment in English and maths (grades 5 or above) – 45% achieved a grade 5 or above in English and maths, 9.1% higher than in 2019 (35.9%).
- Attainment 8 – The average Attainment 8 score is 46.3, 2.3 points higher than in 2019 (44.0).
- The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) Achievement – 16% achieved the English Baccalaureate (based on a grade 5 or above in English and maths), 2.4% higher than in 2019 (13.6%).
- EBacc Average Point Score (APS) - The average EBacc point score is 3.95, 0.26 points higher than in 2019 (3.69).

KS4 national data is currently unavailable.

Provisional 2022 Key Stage 5 Results:

As announced by Ofqual in September 2021, overall A Level and AS Level results will be lower this year than in 2021 when grades were awarded by teacher assessment. Grades will be higher than in 2019, when students last sat summer exams, in recognition of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Of the 19 secondary schools in Walsall, two schools have no Year 13 cohort (Brownhills Ormiston Academy and Willenhall E-ACT Academy).

Based on the indicative results submitted to Walsall directly from schools on results day (18th August 2022), the headline results in Walsall are listed below. Please note, these results do not include the college and the overall results for Walsall may change significantly when these are available.

Of the 17 schools who have provided their results, the main headlines are:

- 31.2% of A Level & equivalent qualifications achieved an A*-A grade, compared to the national average of 36.4%. (-5.2% gap to national)
- 97.4% of A Level & equivalent qualifications achieved in Walsall were an A*-E grade, compared to the national average of 98.4%. (-1% gap to national)
- 10.2% of entries received an A* in Walsall, compared to 14.6% nationally. (-4.4% gap to national)
- The average points per entry for the A Level cohort is 35.82, 6.07 points higher than the 2019 average of 29.75. National data is currently unavailable.
- The average points per entry for the Academic cohort is 35.55. National data is currently unavailable.
- The average points per entry for the Tech cohort is 34.91, 4.82 points higher than the 2019 average of 30.09. National data is currently unavailable.
- The average points per entry for the Applied General cohort is 31.87, 2.64 points higher than the 2019 average of 29.23. National data is currently unavailable.

The proportion of children who are identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with national averages. Outcomes at the end of Primary school have fallen in line with NCER emerging national figures:

- In 2022, 3.5% of pupils have a special educational need (EHCP) compared with 4% nationally and 12.6% of pupils have SEN Support which equals the National average.
- Based on provisional data, 15.1% of children with SEN Support achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths compared with 21.1% nationally. Although a decline of 2.9% from 2019, the gap to national has narrowed from 7% in 2019 to a 6% gap in 2022.
- 4.6% of children with an EHCP achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths in 2022. This shows a decline of 5.4% when compared to 2019 and is lower than the emerging national average of 7.2%.

At KS4, outcomes for children with special educational needs are lower than national and regional averages.

- In 2021, for children with SEN Support, the attainment 8 score was 31.0, compared to 36.7 nationally and is lower than the statistical neighbours average score of 32.9
- For children with an EHCP, the attainment 8 score in 2021 was 13.5, in line with statistical neighbours but lower than the national score of 15.7

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

- 42% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading Writing and Maths in 2022 which equals the emerging national figure. The FSM/Non FSM percentage gap for Walsall LA has narrowed from 23% in 2019 to a 21.8% gap in 2022.
- 44% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths in 2022 compared to 43% nationally. Compared with non-disadvantaged pupils in Walsall the gap remains at 21%.
- At KS4, the average Attainment 8 score for those pupils eligible for Free School Meals is 37.7 in 2021 with a gap of 13.4 compared with those who are not eligible for free school meals.
- The average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils in Walsall for 2021 is 40.3 which equals the national average, with a gap of 13 compared to non-disadvantaged pupils. This is better than the national gap of 14.4.

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.

We continue to embed our Walsall Right 4 Children strategy in partnership with schools and colleges and the wider partnership. At the heart of our strategy is the basic premise of the voice of the child being heard and that through partnership our services ensure the support is in place so children can have the best start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.

Our direction of travel in respect of the Walsall Learning Alliance, Walsall Families of Schools, and a Specialist Provision Review puts us in a strong position to respond pro-actively to the potential changes that are set to occur over the coming 12 months.

3. National changes and direction of travel School Improvement Grant

The School Improvement Grant for local authorities funds LA statutory duties in regard to school improvement (as set out in Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and Schools Causing Concern guidance). This includes the issuing of warning notices to setting of cause of concern; funding the ability for us to intervene such as making requirements on Governing Boards or ultimately imposing an Interim Executive Board and our joint work with the Regional School Commissioners office to raise standards locally.

Since 2017, the Grant has been provided to support councils to fulfil their core improvement activities, with the amount received by each council proportionate to the number of maintained schools in their area.

A national consultation on the changes to the grant concluded before Christmas 2021, with the outcome published in early January.

The proposal consulted on was for a 50% reduction in the School Improvement Grant from April 2022 and 100% de-delegation from April 2023. Rather than the funding being given to local authorities it would instead be a choice for Schools Forums to de-delegate from school core funding should they so choose. It was made clear that the funding currently given to the LA would not be pass ported to core school budgets. The grant would be removed and the funding had instead been nominally incorporated into the school funding announced as part of the autumn 2021 Spending Review.

The consultation recognised the force of opinion in terms of concerns over the removal of the grant. These included the ability for local authorities to be able to absorb further funding pressures; what would happen if schools forums did not agree to de-delegation for core school improvement activity; and the desire for further clarity on what is considered core school improvement.

Whilst recognising these concerns the government has approved the changes hence the grant will be reduced by 50% in 2022-23 and completely by 2023-24.

The core responsibilities for the LA remain unchanged but the direct funding will cease which will be an

added pressure to our services.

National SEND Review

The SEND Review was originally scheduled for publication in 2019 as an evaluation of the changes brought about by the Children and Families Act 2014. This included the introduction of the SEND code of practice, which sets out legal duties for education providers, local authorities and health bodies to provide for young people with special educational needs (SEN).

Nationally there are now nearly twice as many pupils on education, health and care plans (EHCPs) as there were on Statements in 2014. This growth is set to continue with increasing pressures placed on schools, local authorities and health services to support those children and young people with a diagnosis. The SEND review is expected to outline greater support and intervention for children and young people in mainstream settings, reducing the requirements and additional costs of specialist provision.

The growth rate of identified SEN in Walsall is much higher than comparators. Between 2016 and 2021, SEN support has increased by over 24% compared with less than 10% regionally and nationally and the number of children with an EHCP has increased by over 50% compared with 26% regionally and 36% nationally. Requests for EHCPs are increasing. In 2021 there were 647 requests for assessment – an increase of 32% on 2018 *compared with an 18% growth rate regionally and a 29% growth rate nationally*. Maintained EHCPs have increased by 48%. Historically this has been lower than comparators suggesting that SEND in Walsall may have gone unrecognised for some children. However the gap has narrowed as increases in the proportion of children with recognised SEND needs have been more rapid in recent years, demonstrating an improvement in the local areas recognition of children's needs.

How are we responding to the change? Children and young people being identified earlier in terms of special educational needs or disability is a good thing in that early intervention and support benefits the child and their family/ carers. Nationally however there is ever growing demand that is expensive and unsustainable. We have rolled out our Inclusion Strategy to support early identification and support for children. We have also reviewed and changed our High Needs Funding model and bands to be needs led for the child, regardless of setting. We have also reviewed and rolled out the Graduated Response toolkit and documentation.

The Walsall Specialist Provision Review is being led in conjunction with the sector with a Head teachers Reference Group developing long-term sustainable solutions around provision within Walsall. On the basis of every child has the right to a mainstream school place, some with additional support, the review is exploring how to most effectively support children and young people in mainstream settings, provide hub support for more challenging support needs and only then ensure a specialist place is available to meet a child's needs where necessary. The review may lead to the re-designation of some specialist provision places.

In tandem, we are remodelling our Specialist Inclusion Services to be commissioned to provide support to schools and families to enable children and young people to thrive in the setting that best meets their needs. This will encompass support around behaviour, mental health support, and, children at risk of poor/ non-school attendance or exclusion.

Schools Bill

On 12 May 2022, the government introduced its new Schools Bill. If the bill is passed by parliament as expected, it will bring significant changes to the sector. The provisions set out are consistent with the government's policy direction and principles announced in the Schools White paper:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child>

The provisions are not law yet; the bill's progress through parliament has taken several months so far. Key elements of the bill include:

Academy trusts

The bill reflects the government's aim of all schools being part of a multi academy trust (MAT) – or in the process of joining one – by 2030. It focuses on the regulatory framework around MATs, setting out new

expected standards and strengthening powers to intervene in 'failing' MATs. The government has provided a 'factsheet' for the proposed increased intervention powers:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1077814/Academy_Trust_Intervention_Powers_-_Schools_Bill_Factsheet.pdf

Specific provisions of the bill include:

A new legal underpinning for enforceable academy trust standards, replacing the inconsistencies caused by different funding agreements and articles. The government have published a factsheet which covers the new provision:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1082158/Academy_Trust_Standards_-_Schools_Bill_Factsheet_.pdf

Setting standards in relation to governance structures and procedures. This may include new powers to set expectations for the composition of trust boards and their responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of members. The Department for Education (DfE) has stated that this will mostly replicate existing rules.

A new power for local authorities (LAs) to apply for an academy order so that one or more of their schools must join a MAT. This means the power to request an academy order no longer rests solely with the governing body. While the governing body must be consulted by the LA (further detail on consultation is likely in forthcoming guidance), the board ultimately has a legal duty to facilitate conversion after the academy order is received. The DfE has published a factsheet setting out their objectives:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1074508/Local_authority_academisation_power_-_Schools_Bill.pdf

A clearer set of protections for grammar and faith schools to ensure they can maintain their status on joining a trust. This moves the protection for a faith school's religious status, and a grammar school's selective status, from contract (the funding agreement) to law.

New provisions governing the transfer of land by local authorities, intended to make the academisation process smoother. The government have published a factsheet which covers the new provision:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1074509/Transfer_of_land_by_local_authorities_-_Schools_Bill.pdf

A new system of central intervention in trusts and academies judged to be failing.

The starting point for this is the existing "notice to improve" mechanism. Notices are issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on behalf of the Secretary of State where trusts are considered to have breached any of their legal and contractual duties (including in meeting the newly defined academy standards) or are displaying "significant weaknesses" in the trust board's governance procedures or management of the trust. If a trust is judged to have failed to comply with a notice to improve, various sanctions are possible, some of which are new.

Funding

The bill acts as a restatement of the government's commitment to implement the National Funding Formula (NFF) – first announced in 2016 – in full. It facilitates new regulations which will gradually reduce the scope of LAs to alter funding, as has previously been announced, so that schools are funded directly in line with the NFF. Further consultation is expected in the near future on transition to a direct NFF.

The government have published a factsheet on the national funding formula reforms:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1077817/National_Funding_Formula_reforms_-_Schools_Bill_Factsheet.pdf

Attendance

The bill reflects the government's commitment to improve attendance in schools, with a new obligation for schools and trusts to have an attendance policy in place. This reflects newly published guidance, which comes into force from September:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

Safeguarding

The bill also takes steps to better protect young people, especially those in illegal schools, or those not in school at all. New provisions include:

- New powers for Ofsted to act against illegal schools, and new powers for inspectors when investigating them.
- Clarified rules on when settings need to register as schools, forcing more settings to do so, and so fall under the regulatory framework around schools.
- An expanded remit of the Teaching Regulation Agency, to make it easier to ban unsuitable teachers from the profession.
- A new requirement for LAs to maintain a register of children not in school, alongside a duty on LAs to provide support to home-educating families. This reflects the increase in home education and the number of children whose educational provision is not certain following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The White Paper

In the meantime, the Government has indicated its continued commitment to its ambition for 2030 and the following [document](#), 'Implementing school system reform in 2022/23 Next steps following the Schools White Paper May 2022', remains in place:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-school-system-reform-in-2022-to-2023>

The Schools White Paper sets out a long term vision for a school system that helps every child to fulfil their potential, founded on achieving world class literacy and numeracy. It has targets that, by 2030, 90% of primary school children are meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths; and that the average GCSE grades in both English language and maths are raised to 5. It aims to achieve these ambitions by ensuring an excellent teacher for every child; high standards of curriculum, attendance and behavior; targeted support for every child who needs it; and a stronger and fairer school system that works for every child.

The White Paper outlines how a strong school system will be delivered by schools, trusts, local authorities (LAs), faith bodies and the Department for Education (the Department) working together – setting an ambition for all schools to be in a strong multi-academy trust (MAT), or with plans to join or form one, by 2030.

This implementation framework outlines immediate next steps towards this ambition. It focuses primarily on academic year 2022/23 and is designed to help schools, trusts, LAs and faith bodies, mainly dioceses, think about what they should do next. It contains guidance and information to help planning for the short term and signposts further work the Department will be taking as it moves towards its 2030 ambition.

In this first phase, the priorities are:

Education Investment Areas (EIAs), including **Priority EIAs**, where they will introduce an area based approach to commissioning trusts. These are also the areas where we will focus new powers of statutory intervention in underperforming schools, subject to the outcome of consultation and parliamentary approval.

Area based commissioning will see the DfE working closely with local partners to establish a coherent local organisation of schools based on strong trusts, per our guidance on building strong academy trusts, and addressing problems of sustained underperformance.

EIAs

Levelling up the United Kingdom announced 55 EIAs – LAs with the lowest rates of combined KS2 and KS4 attainment in 2018/9, existing Opportunity Areas, or areas identified for additional school improvement support. The DfE will focus early attention and financial support on EIAs and will agree an area wide set of priorities developed with partners locally, including school and trust leaders, LAs and faith bodies, mainly dioceses.

EIAs will also benefit from other support, including the Levelling Up Premium for eligible teachers in priority subjects.

The Schools White Paper sets out that, within the 55 EIAs, a subset of 24 areas will become Priority EIAs where we build on this support by offering additional benefits, such as a local needs funding pot of around £40m, a MAT Leadership development programme for aspiring trust leaders and an extension of the Connect

the Classroom offer to all schools.

Walsall has been identified as an EIA and a Priority EIA and officers are currently in discussion with the DfE on the structure and timeline on how the EIA will be taken forward.

Schools in EIAs consistently rated as less than Good

Schools that are judged inadequate, be they maintained or academies, are already eligible for intervention. Subject to consultation and parliamentary approval for the necessary regulations, from September 2022 maintained schools and academies that are currently judged as Requires Improvement (RI) by Ofsted, and were also judged below Good in their previous full inspection, may also be in scope.

An area based approach to commissioning trusts

Building a strong trust system which includes all schools means that the DfE must work in a joined up way with local partners, starting in those areas most in need. It means working together to consider the needs of an area, and designing and shaping trust formations and the pattern of provision, so that schools in trusts work together well and are linked into communities. To achieve this, the DfE will adopt an area based approach to commissioning in EIAs. This will focus on quality first, identifying those which are best placed to take on underperforming schools in these areas.

Converting remaining schools and moving to a fully trust led system in a local area

The pattern of school structure and organisation across the country is mixed. The White Paper announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, the DfE will introduce new powers enabling the Secretary of State to bring an LA's maintained schools into the academy system where requested by an LA. In these areas, there is an opportunity to move more quickly to a fully trust led system.

Through our Walsall Right 4 Children vision we have a well-established sector led, commissioning approach to responding to the needs of children and young people across the Borough. This puts us in a strong position to respond to both the challenges and opportunities presented during the coming 12 months and beyond. Some of these key initiatives include:

Walsall Learning Alliance is the sector led strategic partnership forum that is driving the debate around how we collectively address the future challenges and opportunities facing the sector and children and young people across the Borough. Independently Chaired and with representation from all phases of schools, local universities, governors and the Council the Alliance is leading on evidence based research to build best practice across the sector. This includes in areas such as teacher recruitment, SEND, raising standards and transition.

Walsall Families of Schools is the vision for how, as a partnership, we will sustain and enhance high quality education provision across the Borough for the next 10 years and beyond to the benefit of the children, young people and communities of Walsall. In its simplest terms, Walsall Families of Schools is based on the principle that: Collaboration, federation or acadamisation are the most effective means of securing the long-term future of high quality education provision in Walsall. It is for school leaders and Governing Boards to lead the way with the approach that best meets the needs of their school communities, with the Council supporting and facilitating this. In the medium term no school should be an island unto itself.

It's a building block for the conversation with Head teachers and governors about how we secure the leadership and governance capacity for our schools in the future. It also prompts leaders to take the fate of their future governance in their own hands rather than risk it being decided upon either by Ofsted (and an inadequate judgement forcing academisation) or through government policy.

4. Achievements and challenges

SEND

We focused at during the year on implementing 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 also focused on the delivery of the actions and improvements identified in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) following the Local Area Inspection in 2019.

It is pleasing to report that following a re-inspection by Ofsted and CQC (Care Quality Commission), progress and improvements have been identified with Walsall's Special Education Needs support offer.

The Local Area SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) services inspection, that took place in February 2019, identified nine areas of concern in the way that SEND services were being delivered in Walsall. The Local Area, which is a partnership across a number of organisations, was instructed to develop and deliver a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) outlining how it intended to improve services for children with SEND and address the issues identified.

A re-inspection took place from 20 to 22 June to assess whether the Local Area had achieved sufficient progress in delivering the improvements set out in the WSoA.

The inspection team held a number of focus groups across the two days with key people who have been involved in the delivery of the WSoA and also met with schools, parents and carers and children and young people to capture their feedback, including feedback from Walsall's impartial advice and support service SENDIASS and the parent/carer forum, FACE Walsall.

Well done to the teams involved in this process in what was an important re-inspection for us as a partnership. Seven out of the nine identified areas showed progress and improvement which is a great achievement although we recognise that there is still work to be done.

The inspectors acknowledged the way in which Local Area leaders have worked with FACE Walsall to improve communication with parents and carers regarding SEND issues across the local area. FACE Walsall also now sit on the Local Area Improvement Board, ensuring that families' voices are clearly heard and understood.

The report also highlighted that the local area has collaborated well to develop Walsall's SENDIASS and this has been universally well received with parents and carers welcoming and appreciating the help and guidance this service provides, as well as the guidance with navigating the local area's systems and processes.

Other areas of progress identified by inspectors include the development of groups to gain the views of children and young people in order to shape support going forward and improved support for Autism, including post-diagnosis support for parents and children and specialist training for professionals.

You can read our full Ofsted re-inspection report on the SEND Local Offer link below.

https://go.walsall.gov.uk/children_and_young_people/special_educational_needs_and_disabilities_send_local_offer/joint_local_area_inspection_of_send

It is encouraging that the report highlights our progress in co-production work with parents and carers, increased usage of the Early Help Children's Hub, our Holiday Activity and Food Programme offer and the improvements in communication that have been made by the service.

We recognise that there is still room for improvement and we will continue to work collaboratively with our partners and families to ensure that an excellent offer is delivered for families impacted by SEND. The focus now will be on further improvement of the Local Offer and the quality of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. Both of these areas are delivered in partnership and plans are already underway to make headway

Admissions

Primary Admissions

3440 reception applications were received on time and every applicant received an offer of a school place for September 2022. Of those, 3182 (92.5%) received their first preference, 152 (4.4%) their second preference and 44 (1.3%) their third preference.

Reception Offers	September 2022	September 2021
Total Walsall on-time applications	3440	3541
Offered 1st preference	3182 (92.5%)	3235 (91.4%)
Offered 2nd preference	152 (4.4%)	161 (4.5%)
Offered 3rd preference	44 (1.3%)	51 (1.4%)
Offered one of their top three preferences	3378 (98.2%)	3447 (97.3%)
Not offered any preferred school and allocated an alternative	62 (1.8%)	94 (2.7%)

Note : Of the 62 children in Walsall not offered one of their preferred schools, 48 of these applicants had expressed a preference for only one school - rather than using all of the three preferences that every applicant is entitled to. We advise applicants to utilise all three preferences. Offers are NOT made on a first come, first served basis but applications received on time are processed before those received after the deadline date.

Secondary Admissions

3,836 applications were received on time. This is an increase of 129 applications from last year's figure. Of those, 3055 applicants (79.6%) received their first preference, 400 (10.4%) their second preference and 122 (3.2%) their third preference.

Every applicant who applied on time has been offered a place at a school for September 2022. Parents and carers can express preferences for up to five schools and 94.6% of children received an offer of a place at one of their preferred schools.

There were 208 (5.4%) families who were allocated a place at an alternative school rather than at one of their preferred schools. Of these 83 children had only included one preference on their application form.

Extended role of Virtual Head teacher

Since September 2021, the role of the Virtual School Head was extended to promote the education of all children aged 0-18 with a social worker and those who have had a social worker within the last 6 years (Ever 6), meaning there will be a local champion for children with a social worker in every local authority in England. This is to ensure more focus is placed on targeting support earlier on in these young people's lives and helping improve how they engage with education.

To support the new duties we have developed a Vulnerable Learners Hub and appointed three members of 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 have also created a full-time permanent 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. A further post has been developed to support the work of the Vulnerable Learners hub to ensure that all children with a social worker who have an EHCP or who are undergoing a SEN assessment are prioritised.

The Virtual 'School Specialist Support Team, comprising of 3 Education Psychologists, 2 Speech and Language Therapists and a CAMHS Practitioner work closely with schools and social workers to ensure the needs of looked after and vulnerable children with special educational needs are prioritised.

In June 2022 the DfE announced a further 1 year extension to the duties. The focus of the VLH is to ensure all children with a social worker have a school place, have good school attendance, are not being excluded and have the right support and interventions to enable them to succeed.

Since the development of the VLH in September 2021, we have:

- Developed a Vulnerability Matrix to help identify those children and young people most at risk of underachievement. Vulnerability factors, such as children missing education, suspensions, below

50% attendance, Youth Justice Involvement, reduced time tables, elective home education etc. are all scored to enable the team to identify and implement appropriate support and challenge where needed.

- Extended the work of our SEN Casework Officer to oversee EHCP requests for all children with a social worker
- Attended social work team meetings to inform social workers on how they can access support from the VLH
- Delivered training to Designated Safeguarding leads and designated teachers to highlight the disadvantages children with a social worker may have experienced
- Implemented and led a regional working group with staff from other local authorities carrying out the role of supporting children with a social worker
- Visited over 30 schools to discuss individual and cohorts of children

During the 2021/22 academic year the team have dealt with 348 referrals from social workers, schools and other professionals

	Total	%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub (overall)	348	100%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with SEN support	73	21%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with an EHCP	87	25%
Number of YP referred to the vulnerable hub with an EHCP in progress	2	1%

- 90 issues related to school attendance
- 44 issues related to children missing education
- 40 issues related to exclusions
- 68 issues related to school admissions/awaiting a school placement
- 34 issues related to special educational needs
- Other issues were around reduced timetables, managed moves, support for NEET etc

Reducing the exclusions of children with an Education Health and Care Plan:-

In addition to the work carried out to improve educational outcomes for children with a social worker, the staff in the VLH are also challenging schools where children with an EHCP are at risk of exclusion. The table below shows the number of referrals into the hub for young people at risk of exclusion.

Perm Ex referrals	Total
Number of YP referred at risk of suspension/PEX	33
Number of YP without an identified SEN who were at risk of PEX	11
Number of YP without an identified SEN who went on to be PEX	3
Number of YP on SEN support were at risk of suspension/PEX	12
Number of YP on SEN Support who went on to be PEX	2
Number of YP with an EHCP were at risk of suspension/PEX	10
Number of YP that went on to be PEX	0
Total number of YP at risk of perm ex	33
Total number of exclusions avoided by the VLH	28

Employment and Skills

The service focuses on reducing the number of young people who are not in education employment or training

(NEET) currently at 3.6% (July 2022). At this time of year, the NEETs figures are generally higher than normal but this should drop as we track and support young people into provision for the new academic year. The number of 18-24 years old who are in receipt of a Universal Credit benefit is currently 1850 claimants which has dropped significantly since the start of pandemic which saw 3355 young claimants.

Our service supports key targets group through a number of initiatives and programmes **Walsall Works** supports residents of all ages to improve their skills levels through pre-employment training, basic skills provision and vocational learning courses. The main focus is to improve employability and to support people, especially those who are young, into work placements, apprenticeships and training. Since its inception the programme has achieved:

- 1073 People accessing funded and non-funded Apprenticeships (973 aged 16-24)
- 687 Young People supported into a pre-apprenticeship or traineeships
- 1015 People supported into full or part time training or education
- 2598 People supported into employment (of which 1348 aged 16-24)
- 283 Young people accessing a Kickstart or other work placements

Over the past year, we have maintained face to face engagement through a range of hubs, partner venues and community settings. We have delivered a calendar of jobs and skills roadshow in key neighbourhood wards, two large Walsall Works Expo events and a number of Kickstart job matching sessions with employers and young people. We have refreshed content on our website www.walsallworks.com and continue to cascade opportunities through our social media platforms and our weekly bulletin. These have focussed on jobs in response to urgent recruitment needs in construction, logistics, social care and hospitality.

Black Country Impact which has been delivering since July 2016 (funded by European Social Fund / Youth Employment Initiative) and is now entering its final year of delivery. The project targets 16-29 year olds who are NEET or unemployed with removing to participating in into education, employment, apprenticeships and vocational training.

The programme provides a person centred approach and is embedded into or signposting from key services or organisations which support young people who are known to be unemployed, inactive and at risk of social inclusion. Referrals have been received from practitioners in Further Education, Training Providers, Schools, Early Help, Voluntary Sector, Police, Housing, Probation, Youth Justice, Teenage Parents Team, Transitional Leaving Care, and Supported Housing and through direct referrals from parents and young people.

All Impact Advisors are co-located in the Impact Hub at the Crossings at St Pauls Walsall, which is a drop-in facility which has become a focal point for young people to seek support. During the pandemic we have maintained our NEETs but the levels of young claimants peaked in the borough during the pandemic. The Hub is a vital resource for the community to seek support and is open daily Monday to Friday. The Impact performance to date:

Participant Volumes	Enrolments	Interventions	Outcomes
16-29 year olds	4596	2893	1584

Alongside a number of national gateway organisations, Walsall Council pledged to bring forward good quality 6 month **Kickstart** work placements for young people aged 16-24 who were claiming a Universal Credit benefit. As an approved gateway, we offered support to local employers who wished to take advantage of the scheme and provide job placements to young people. To date our gateway has achieved:

- 130 young people placed into a job placement
- 40 young people were retained by their host employer
- 28 young people secured employment elsewhere
- 23 completed placement but were unemployed post placement
- 17 dropped out the placement due to issues with their employment
- 10 young people secured apprenticeships
- 2 returned to full time education
- 2 current on Kick-start placements (and due to end September 2022)

Through the year we have secured **Careers Enterprise Company** funding to create an Information Advice and Guidance position to work closely with disengaged, vulnerable and hard to reach young people pre-16 and post 16 who are identified as at risk of becoming long term NEET. These would be young people identified as missing education or dropping out of provision and therefore have missed out on vital education and careers guidance.

The projects focussed on year 11-13 age group during the summer to ensure a smooth transition back into post 16 provision or working with two schools who identified a cohort of young people who had missed education. The additional capacity enabled us to work with practitioners, parents and young people who are missing school, in elective home education settings and those not registered with education in Walsall.

We offer a traded income **Careers Information Advice Guidance** service in 1 secondary School, 5 Special Schools and the Virtual School in Walsall. During the coming year we are planning on developing further income from bespoke curriculum activity and more contracts.

5. 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.
- Accelerated Action Plan to be developed and implemented in response to the Revisit of the Local Area
- Improve access and achievement of the vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.
- Attendance and behaviour within our schools continues to be a key priority area.
- Further development of the Vulnerable Learners Hub. From September 2022 the staff in the VLH will be responsible for working alongside schools and other professionals to help reduce the number of all children and young people who are permanently excluded from school. The team will challenge any exclusion where a graduated response to exclusion has not been followed. There is an expectation that Head teachers only use their powers to exclude where all other options to avoid an exclusion have been explored. Where we have a concern about schools not following the graduated response, a schools causing concern referral will be made

6. 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 we are proud of, some of the challenges faced by the Directorates and where attention is being focussed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families going forward. Undoubtedly, the circumstances in which the Directorates are operating will continue to be challenging and there is more to do. There is an absolute determination across all 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.

Councillor Mark Statham
Cabinet Member Education and Skills
October 2022