

24 NOVEMBER, 2015

Update on priorities 5 & 6 of the School Improvement Action Plan

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor C. Towe – Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships

Executive Summary:

Following previous updates provided on other priorities contained within the post Ofsted action plan, this report provides an overview of the actions taken on priorities 5 and 6 in commentary format. The Education Challenge Board receives and discusses updates on all six priorities and analyses detailed performance scorecards supported by a wealth of evidence and performance information. This holds officers of the Local Authority to account for the impact and outcomes of their work.

Priority 5 focuses on ensuring high quality school improvement work undertaken by the Local Authority across schools and Academies.

Priority 6 addresses the issue of ensuring effective school to school support and partnership working between schools across the Local Authority.

Members will recall from previous reports that 'action' and 'impact' are RAG rated separately. This is because there is likely to be a lag between the implementation of new actions and their expected impact.

This report notes the steps being taken to increase the rigour and pace of support and challenge to schools, particularly when there are causes for concern about performance and outcomes. In particular, the update demonstrates the move towards a model of school improvement where schools are less reliant on the Local Authority as a universal provider of services. The Local Authority's role moves more towards a model that identifies and quality assures the good practice that exists in schools across and beyond the Borough and acts to facilitate and broker support between schools.

Reason for scrutiny:

Following Ofsted's inspection of School Improvement in Walsall in June 2014, when the service was deemed to be ineffective because too few schools were judged to be 'good' or better, Members have requested regular updates on progress and improvement. An independently chaired Education Challenge Board has been in place to provide further scrutiny, and its Chair has reported to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny committee as requested.

A detailed action plan was written immediately after the inspection, highlighting six priorities, which have been the focus of regular discussion at the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings ever since.

Recommendations:

To note the progress being made and identify any further strategies or actions to be taken.

Background papers:

The report relates to the School Improvement Action Plan, August 2014, Performance score-card and RAG rating documents as previously discussed. The Action Plan is currently being reviewed and updated.

Resource and legal considerations:

Not applicable.

Citizen impact:

The overall aim of the action plan is that all Walsall schools should be judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or better, because Walsall's children and young people deserve the best, irrespective of any contextual factors that might otherwise act as barriers to their progress and achievement.

Environmental impact:

Not applicable.

Performance management:

All staff working in school improvement have at least one non-negotiable objective linked to the stated aims of the school improvement action plan.

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UPDATE ON PRIORITIES 5 & 6

Priority 5: Ensure that there are robust systems in place to check and improve the quality of the school improvement work of Local Authority officers

Success criteria from the action plan include the following:

- New staffing structure and clear roles, responsibilities and accountability for all School Improvement Team (SIT) staff are linked extricably with school performance and priorities of the service.
- Schools across the Local Authority improve so that by July 2015 no Local Authority maintained school or sponsor led Academy is judged to be in an Ofsted category 4.
- An increase in the proportion of schools judged to be Outstanding by 5% in 2014-15 and a further 8% in 2015-16.
- By July 2016 all Academy converters are graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- Improvement in schools' engagement with the Local Authority as confidence in the quality of provision and support increases. All schools engage fully and effectively with the Local Authority by April 2016.
- Profile of Ofsted judgements on Walsall schools matches that of the more successful West Midlands Local Authorities by July 2017.
- Local Authority strategy for improvement moves significantly to being more proactive than reactive.
- Achievement at the end of the reception year matches national average by July 2015.
- Achievement in 6th form matches or exceeds national by July 2016. All schools should be above DfE post 16 floor standards by July 2016

The current RAG rating, as reported to the Education Challenge Board in November 2015 is **AMBER for action and **AMBER** for impact.**

In response, the following actions have been taken;

- 5.1 Meetings continue between Local Authority senior officers, the Regional School's Commission accountable for performance and improvement in Academies and the Department for Education to ensure the appropriate challenge, intervention and support for Academies whose performance is causing concern. The Local Authority's challenge to Academy under-performance has been strengthened.
- 5.2 Two full time permanent School Improvement Advisers started work with Walsall in September and have made a very positive contribution to the team. They are both former Headteachers. Additional capacity has also been provided to the School Improvement Team. An experienced Interim Team Manager has been appointed alongside a Secondary School Improvement Partner. Two Headteachers (one primary and one secondary) have also been

seconded part time to develop the primary and secondary leadership strategies. A leadership conference is being planned for March 2016.

- 5.3 Notes of visit are recorded electronically. Regular monitoring is carried out to ensure consistency and rigour. Regular updates are provided to the Director of Children's Services through a monthly report to the Divisional Management team. The monitoring and quality assurance of the work of School Improvement officers has significantly improved with clear evidence of improved performance as a result. The Cabinet Member: Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships also regularly attend these meetings.
- 5.4 The Director of Children's Services chairs a fortnightly Director's School Performance Review meeting to monitor schools based on clear categorisation using data and other performance data. These meetings are used to evaluate the impact of the Local Authority's work in each school and agree future support, challenge and intervention.
- 5.5 Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in schools causing concern are held to account in meetings with senior officers, with targets set for rapid improvement, monitored 6 weekly through a revised School Improvement Review Process
- 5.6 Preparations are underway for consultation on a revised staffing structure to address the priorities in the action plan alongside the proposed budget savings.
- 5.7 The Local Authority has led the development of a 14-19 Partnership Group which bring together all organisations making provisions post 14.

The impact has been:

- 5.8 Greater rigour and consistency in work in school and in the use of notes of visit to provide appropriate support and challenge to schools. This includes much more effective use of individual school attainment and progress data and performance information. A revised approach to the Local Authority receiving and analysing in year progress data from schools is in place, with the next data capture this half term. This supports the Local Authority's challenge and monitoring role.
- 5.9 Positive working relations have been established with the majority of principals of Academies and Academy Boards. Jane Bonner is the Local Authority representative on a number of Academy Boards. This is illustrated in recent surveys, attendance at meetings and by the level of engagement in working groups across the Borough.
- 5.10 The Local Authority School Improvement Review process has had significant impact on those schools where it is used. Between 2014 and 2015 there has been a 20% improvement on the key outcome measures for children at the end of primary school.
- 5.11 The number of schools causing concern to the Local Authority has reduced between 2013 and 2015.

- 5.12 Consecutive National evaluations of Walsall's work in supporting, monitoring and moderating school assessment and testing procedures have been very positive and give high levels of assurance that teacher assessment is accurate and testing is carried out according to requirements.
- 5.13 The Local Authority has provided strong leadership to the 0-5 School Ready Strategy which is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of provision and outcomes. In 2015 the outcomes for 5 year olds at the end of their reception year improved by 8%, narrowing the gap with national by 2%.
- 5.14 The Local Authority have been recognised nationally for creating free early learning places for 2 year olds; nearly 75% of eligible 2 year olds have a place. This is above the national average in the top 5 of West Midlands Local Authorities.
- 5.15 The Local Authority has undertaken a systematic review of Governance in every school and is taking action where it is ineffective. All Governing Bodies are now challenged to focus on school improvement to raise standards. Governor training sessions have been held on Raise on Line, understanding data, pupil progress and teaching and learning. A Walsall Governor Association has been established to deliver improvements across the Borough and Walsall National Leaders of Governance are supporting the Association and individual Governing Bodies.

Priority 6: Ensure effective school to school support across the Local Authority

Success criteria from the action plan include the following:

- The capacity for school improvement intervention in Walsall is increased as evidenced in Improving Ofsted outcomes.
- A trend of improvement in the proportion of good and better schools to exceed the improvement found nationally.
- The success criteria within the Walsall School Improvement Strategy are met by 2016.
- Schools have greater autonomy in the selection of quality school improvement partnerships and expertise.
- School leaders have a greater shared ownership and accountability for the children and young people outcomes across Walsall.
- School to school support is recognised as a strength when the Local Authority is re-inspected.

The current RAG rating, as reported to the Education Challenge Board is GREEN for action and AMBER for impact.

In response, the following actions have been taken;

- 6.1 The School Improvement Strategy has been reviewed and updated to reflect current priorities and realistically ambitious targets for improvement to 2020.
- 6.2 HMI/Local Authority partnership initiatives to support schools undertaking self and peer reviews have taken place. The first two tranches of training have been completed and 'triad' reviews have taken place. Positive feedback and impact has been received. Plans are in place to roll out the scheme to all schools and Early Years settings.
- 6.3 External advisers have been brought in to carry out Pupil Premium reviews focusing on the impact of the interventions. A Pupil Premium conference took place in September with presentations from nationally recognised speakers and this attracted an attendance of over 200 delegates. Twelve Chairs of Governing Bodies attended. External advisers also chair Improvement Reviews to add capacity and expertise to the School Improvement team.
- 6.4 It has been recognised that in order to facilitate school to school support, good practice information should be collected. Schools self-nominate on the Walsall Link through case studies as examples of good practice. There is evidence of greater usage of the Walsall Link, but limited evidence of impact on school practice to date.
- 6.5 We are working with our own National Leaders of Governance and the Governor Association to develop a team of mentors and trainers. As a result, Walsall's own National Leaders for Governance have been engaged to carry out external reviews of Governance in the Autumn Term.
- 6.6 Partnership working with the National College for School Leadership is strengthening and is leading to a co-ordination of work being brokered by the Teaching Schools in Walsall. A bid is currently being put together for additional funding for the Teaching Schools to support identified schools requiring improvement.
- 6.7 Induction arrangements for new Headteachers have been strengthened to ensure that colleagues feel well supported in the first year of their role. Established Heads are supporting this work and contributing generously with their time.
- 6.8 Termly meetings are now calendared with Diocesan partners to share information and ensure a joined up approach to support and challenge Diocesan schools.
- 6.9 Plans are in place for a leadership conference in March 2016. This will focus on aspects of school leadership and management at all levels, including governance.
- 6.10 Work is underway in partnership with Human Resources colleagues to support schools with a recruitment and retention strategy. Presentations will take place to Headteachers at a briefing in early December.

The impact has been:

- 6.11 All schools and academies have greater access to exemplar practice via the Walsall Link and through their allocated School Improvement Partner.
- 6.12 Further interest from Walsall Headteachers in applying for accreditation as National Leaders of Education. Applications are currently being considered.
- 6.13 Targeted training and support for Governors has led to more effective challenge and support being offered to Headteachers, as evidenced in governing body minutes.
- 6.14 Feedback from new Headteachers shows that the revised induction arrangements have been well received.
- 6.15 Momentum in the development of a school to school support model following an evaluation in September 2015 contributed to by 66 Walsall schools and Academies.

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