

5 January 2016

Update on Priorities 1 & 2 of the School Improvement Action Plan

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Chris Towe – Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships

Executive Summary:

Following overviews provided previously, this report provides an update of the actions taken on priorities 1 and 2 in commentary format.

Priority 1 focuses on ensuring strong leadership in all Walsall schools. This includes leadership at all levels, including governance.

Priority 2 concerns the further refinement of the improvement strategy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

Members have been provided with the most recent Scorecard (**Appendix A**), showing high level measures being used to monitor at a strategic level. The Scorecard was reviewed by the Education Challenge Board on 16 December 2015.

Practice is to 'RAG' action and impact separately, as it is recognised that there will be a lag between the implementation of new actions and their expected impact. Members can be assured that there is an increased urgency across the Borough, and particularly within the school improvement team, to ensure that actions have impact as quickly and sustainably as possible.

The report outlines measures being taken to strengthen leadership at all levels across Walsall schools and how case studies of good practice are being captured to enable more effective brokerage of school to school support. It also demonstrates how capacity is being built across schools through the deployment of practicing local Headteacher colleagues to lead partnership activities.

Reference is made in the report to the rigour of established processes used to tackle weaknesses in leadership and the involvement of senior LA officers.

The importance of protocols for working with a range of partners, including diocesan representatives, the National College and academy sponsors is included, alongside plans to support schools on recruitment, which has been a barrier to progress identified by many Headteachers.

Also contained within the report is an update on the effectiveness of governance across the borough, and the developing relationship between the governor support team and the Governors' Association.

Reason for scrutiny:

Following Ofsted's inspection of School Improvement in Walsall in June 2014, when outcomes were deemed to be ineffective because too few schools were judged to be 'good' or better, Members have requested regular updates on progress. An independently chaired Education Challenge Board meets regularly to provide further scrutiny, and its Chair has reported to this committee as requested. The next meeting of the Board will be on 13 January.

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

Recommendations:

To discuss, scrutinise and challenge the progress being made.

Background papers:

The report relates to the School Improvement Action Plan as previously outlined, score-card and RAG rating documents as outlined above.

Resource and legal considerations: N/A

Citizen impact:

The overall aim of the action plan is that all Walsall schools should become '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 future progress.

Environmental impact: N/A

Performance management:

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

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Report

Priority 1: Ensure that there is a clear strategy to develop future leaders and intervene quickly where leadership, including governance, is weak.

Success criteria from the action plan include the following:

- *An appropriate and targeted training programme for school leaders (senior leaders, middle leaders and governors) is implemented by January 2015.*
- *Action taken to remove weak school leadership is decisive and robust so that by July 2015 inadequate leadership in Walsall LA maintained schools is eradicated.*
- *By July 2015 no LA maintained school or sponsor led Academy is judged to be in an Ofsted category 4.*
- *By July 2015 less than 25% of 6th form provision will be judged to be inadequate. No Sixth form provision will be judged to be inadequate by July 2016.*
- *No EYFS provision will be judged to be inadequate by July 2016.*
- *Ofsted monitoring visits to schools requiring improvement, report leadership (including governance) to be improving from January 2015.*
- *Leadership is judged to be good or better in 72%+ of schools by July 2015 and 78%+ of schools by July 2016.*

Progress to date on this priority – commentary

- 1.1 Based on current evidence from Ofsted inspections, whilst 75% of Walsall schools are deemed to be good or better overall, the figure for effectiveness of leadership and management is 81%, a rise from 77% last May.
- 1.2 Two Headteachers have been seconded for a day a week each to quicken the pace of this work and to ensure buy-in from their peers. A Walsall Leadership Strategy has been developed and consulted on in various stake-holder groups, including Headteachers of all phases.
- 1.3 Evidence of existing good practice across schools has been collected and collated. This is now uploaded onto the Walsall Link.
- 1.4 Programmes to strengthen leadership at senior and middle leader level have been developed using expertise and capacity from our Teaching Schools and other quality assured Walsall settings. The programmes will begin in January 2016.
- 1.5 Co-ordinated efforts are being made by senior officers and Heads of Teaching Schools to seek funding to support school to school support work.
- 1.6 Walsall is a key partner in the recently formed Black Country Teaching School Collaborative, whose vision is to collaborate strategically in order to maximise success for the Black Country family of schools. Partners include Ryders Hayes, Lindens, Rushall, Oakwood and other schools in Wolverhampton, Halesowen and Worcestershire. This will significantly increase capacity to provide leadership support to Walsall schools. Birmingham City University will

provide academic rigour, quality assurance and accreditation to Masters level for participants.

- 1.7 Heads of outstanding schools are being encouraged to apply to the National College for National Leader of Education status. (There are currently four in Walsall.)
- 1.8 Shadowing and internships are being set up by some of our most successful schools to share good practice across the borough.
- 1.9 A robust programme of mentoring began in September 2015 for Headteachers new to the role in Walsall. Early feedback suggests that this is having an impact and is highly valued.
- 1.10 The Director of Children's Services Chairs fortnightly meetings of the school improvement team, where updates on the quality of leadership in Walsall schools and settings is discussed, prior to decisions being made on the need for further support, challenge and/or intervention.
- 1.11 In response to the national teacher and leader recruitment crisis, work is underway to support schools in securing high calibre leaders of the future, e.g. by working with organisations such as *TeachFirst* and *Future Leaders*. (The recent report of Ofsted's Chief Inspector highlighted the fact that the number of entrants to the profession has fallen by 6,500 over the last 5 years, which is 7% below the number needed.)
- 1.12 RAG ratings of governance across Walsall based on analysis of governing body minutes and some reviews of governance show that 56% are rated green, 32% amber and 12% red.
- 1.13 Training for governors continues to evolve based on identified priorities and feedback provided. The programme will be developed still further in partnership with the Governors' Association. Low attendance (24% this term) remains a cause for concern and consultation is underway to better understand the reasons for this.
- 1.14 Feedback from external reviews of governance conducted by the governor support team suggests that the process is rigorous. Follow up actions are co-ordinated by the relevant School Improvement Partner.
- 1.15 Vacancies on governing bodies run at 9.5%, with LA vacancies down to 4. Discussions are underway to explore plans for future recruitment initiatives.
- 1.16 Mentoring for new Chairs is at an early stage. It is hoped that the Association will take responsibility for this.

Priority 2: Ensure the LA improvement strategy is fit for purpose

Success criteria from the action plan include the following:

- *HMI re-inspection judges the LA arrangements for school improvement are effective.*
- *The Walsall School Improvement Strategy has measurable success criteria and milestones to facilitate regular evaluation of impact.*
- *The Strategy is focused on improving outcomes for children and young people, reducing gaps in achievement between pupil groups and preparing children and young people for their next stage in education/employment as citizens of a modern Britain.*
- *The proportion of Walsall children and young people attending good or better schools increases by 10% in 2014/15 and by a further 5% in 2015/16. (Walsall currently at 65%; national 79.8%)*
- *By July 2015 no LA maintained school or sponsor-led Academy is judged to be in an Ofsted category 4.*
- *All stakeholders have clarity on how the Strategy is to be implemented and have confidence in the school improvement team.*
- *By July 2015 no school will be below floor standards in key areas.*
- *By July 2016 LA average attainment in KS1, KS2 and KS4 will be at or above national average. By July 2016 LA average progress across KS2 or KS2-4 will be at or above national averages.*

Progress to date on this priority – commentary

- 2.1 The Local Authority regularly seeks external validation of our improved practices and protocols in order that we can revise and improve the way in which we operate. The recommendations of the external review in June 2015 are being implemented and further external review work has taken place this term.
- 2.2 A tiered hierarchy of information has been shared with the Challenge Board to identify the connectivity between various documents connected with school improvement recovery. At a strategic level, the revised School Improvement Strategy contains the LA level measures around pupils' academic outcomes and Ofsted judgements. The Scorecards contain the highest level measures broken down into sub-categories including school leadership and Ofsted outcomes. The Strategic Action Plan is 'RAGged' on a regular basis prior to each Challenge Board meeting and underneath this sit the various service delivery plans, which contain the operational details of actions and expected impact.
- 2.3 Realistic, but aspirational targets have been included in the revised School Improvement Strategy, setting out our expected trajectory to 2020.
- 2.4 The Portfolio Holder and senior officers make regular visits to schools to see examples of good practice and challenge underperformance, as appropriate.

- 2.5 Plans for additional Early Years improvement, financially supported by School Forum funding, have been shared at the primary headteacher forum and directly with heads and Early Years leaders.
- 2.6 Targeted support for sixth form provision is not yet developed, but data has been shared with secondary Headteachers and a task and finish group convened to explore ways of improving outcomes.
- 2.7 Ofsted inspection outcomes are closely monitored on a weekly basis. 75% of Walsall schools are currently judged to be good or better, compared to 71.4% in January 2015. Whilst this improvement is encouraging, the national average has also improved over time and Walsall is now 8.9% below the national average on this measure, although the gap is narrowing from 10.2% in May 2014.
- 2.8 Relationships are being further strengthened with partners including academy sponsors and the Anglican and Catholic diocese. The Local Authority challenges and seeks to work in partnership with the Regional Schools Commissioner on the performance and improvement of Academies in Walsall. A draft protocol for working with the Academies is being consulted on (**Appendix B**).

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Priority 1: Ensure strong leadership in all Walsall Schools		Responsibility	Overall Action RAG	Overall Impact RAG	Comment where action / impact is red
Action ref	Action area				
1.1	Case studies are available by December 2015 and shared on Walsall Link	JB			
	Good practice is shared termly in DCS briefings				
	Working partnership with the National College for School Leadership supports leadership improvement				
1.2	Regular review of the impact of the leadership strategy is reported to the ECB and evidences improvement.	AB			First report of progress to ECB December 2015: regularity and improvement over time to be demonstrated
1.3	By December 2015 all schools are able to articulate the LA priorities/targets concerning pupil outcomes	JB			
1.4	A shared action plan is formulated by November 2015	PH			
	By January all new Chairs of Governors are supported by an experienced mentor.				Interim Governor Manager and Executive of Governors' Association are working together to take this forward
	Local Governor Mark criteria developed by April 2016				
	Offers to fill LA Governor vacancies are made to schools within 4 weeks				
	By July 2018 over 40% of schools have achieved the WGM for quality governorship.				
1.5	Schools confident to commission high quality support from Walsall and beyond.	PH			
	Register published on Walsall Link by April 2016				
1.9	Warning letters and other SCC protocols are implemented (including IEBs where appropriate).	LP			Robust challenge is provided to LA maintained schools, indirect challenge is provided via the Regional Schools Commissioner for sponsored academies.
	Outcome from Director's School Performance Review (DSPR) meetings acted on promptly.				
	Evidence of structural change resulting from challenge meetings held between senior officers and Headteachers /Chairs of Governors to establish action for rapid improvement.				
1.7	By July 2016 evidence shows leadership in faith schools improving and more planned leadership succession in place (– especially in Catholic schools).	JB			
1.8	Register of aspiring leaders is maintained by the LA	AB			Currently undertaken by the 4 teaching schools and will be brought together on the Link in one cohesive form By April 2016

1.90	There is a year on year increase in the number of NLE/LLE/NLGs accredited from Walsall schools.	AB			LA has encouraged headteachers to apply in each recruitment round. Nationally, there have been recruitment exercises, which limits progress.
	Measurable impact of NLE/LLE/NLG engagement				Mixed picture around deployment of resources but some significant positive impact around NLEs and NLGs
	Capacity for increased sector led improvement increased				



Children's Services

Draft Protocols for Working with Academies

Aims:

- To ensure that Walsall has an accurate and up to date picture of pupil attainment and progress data within converter and sponsored academies.
- To avoid the need for duplication of time and effort for academy leaders.
- To forge positive relationships between schools and academies, and between the institutions and the local authority.
- To help develop sector-led improvement in Walsall by identifying good practice that could be shared.

Protocols:

- 'Working within the statutory framework the School Improvement team is committed to improving life chances for all children and young people in Walsall by engaging with schools and academies through effective dialogue. This will ensure a consistent approach to support and challenge, which will result in all schools making sustainable improvement.'
(*School Improvement Team Handbook – July 2015*)
- Senior Council officers, including the Head of Service - Education Standards and Improvement will meet academy sponsors on a termly basis.
- All academies will have the opportunity to work with a named member of the school improvement team to support school improvement. Notification will take place at the start of each academic year.
- Following desk-top analysis at the start of the autumn term, the school improvement team manager will inform the academy of the local authority's proposed support band and rationale, requesting a meeting to discuss with the Principal.
- Academies will be invited to identify examples of good practice to be posted on The Walsall Link and included in Walsall's developing directory of good practice.
- All academies will be offered a termly half day visit to discuss performance data and issues arising. All visits will be recorded using the electronic system and shared with the Headteacher/Principal. Where a Raising Achievement Board (or similar) is in place, it is hoped that a representative of the school improvement team could attend, thereby avoiding the need for additional requests for information or meetings.

- If any additional needs arise from these visits then the key contact will offer to signpost good practice, which could include support from another school or academy and/or traded services from within the School Improvement Service
- Academies will be encouraged to engage in sector led improvement by supporting other academies and schools.
- Where a new Principal has been appointed, to complement any additional support from sponsors or elsewhere, the local authority will offer its induction process to quickly ensure that the new incumbent feels welcome to Walsall and can get the support of others working close by. (There is no charge for this process.)
- Should an academy cause concern for the local authority by virtue of a decline in standards, it will be discussed in the Director's Schools' Performance Review (DSPR) process, which will identify issues and consider next steps which may lead to an escalation to sponsors, Regional Schools' Commissioner or the DfE.
- Following the above process, senior local authority officers will consider flagging concerns about performance of academies in their termly meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner and officials from the DfE.