

10 December 2013		ITEM: 5
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Report on Schools Partnerships		
Report of: Michael Peters – Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills and Ruth Brock, School Improvement Manager.		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Accountable Head of Service: As above		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		
Purpose of Report: To provide an update on the developing strategy for schools partnerships in Thurrock.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee considers the suggested features and direction for schools partnership for education improvement in Thurrock in the light of the recently published findings of the Thurrock Education Commission.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1** Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its last meeting, received a report on the findings of the Thurrock Education Commission. The report recognised significant improvement in education and attainment over the last few years and a desire to push further to make Thurrock a place where ambition and high achievement can flourish. The Commission made six recommendations for accelerating progress in Thurrock schools. One of these recommendations was to grow the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve.
- 2.2** The committee asked for a short paper on current schools partnerships.
- 2.3** The core issues that are relevant to the development of schools partnerships are;

- Achieving an overarching educational vision and strategy that was owned by all educational partners in Thurrock.
- Having a clear relationship between schools and the local authority, and the development of a greater level of trust between the Council and head teachers and among schools themselves.
- Developing partnerships within a relatively fragmented system with different types of school structures.

2.4 There are 53 schools in Thurrock including the Pupil Referral Unit of which 30 are academies. Of these there are 40 primary, 10 secondary, 2 special schools and a pupil referral unit which has school designation. The borough has many different types of school including Academy, Free School, Community/Community Special, Foundation, Voluntary Aided, and Voluntary Controlled. Of the denominational schools there are both Church of England and Roman Catholic. Of the schools in Thurrock, 30 are academies/free schools and 23 are maintained by the borough. Education provision in the borough is both diverse and fragmented. This reflects the developing position across England.

2.5 There is widespread recognition across schools that rapid and sustained improvement is achieved by deep collaboration and that competition presents both benefits and challenges. The Commission suggests that a shared, borough wide vision with schools working in partnership towards this will effect change. The Commission found considerable interest and enthusiasm for working more collaboratively with the Council on this.

3. SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS

3.1 The Education Commission noted the significant improvement in Thurrock schools in recent years to which the Council had contributed and suggested that the school improvement model should continue to a more schools-led approach to school improvement.

3.2 The current model draws on elements of this and this is in line with developments already planned and discussed with the Commission. Schools nationally are increasingly taking on the role of providing improvement to other schools and this is already evident in Thurrock. The Commission believes there is sufficient good practice in Thurrock schools to enable this to happen and this is supported by the Council. The role of governors is also cited as a crucial factor here.

3.3 Schools have historically worked together in clusters and in informal partnerships. For the last two years there has been an emerging and complex economy of schools including multi-academy trust, stand alone academies, sponsored academies, maintained schools, free schools and 6th form provision. School to school support has been key to the process and

has been encouraged, facilitated and funded by the Council and pre-empted by the emergence of three national initiatives; accreditation of local and national leaders of education (LLE/NLE), teaching school alliances and School Direct training. The LA has funded the LLE and NLE programme despite government funding ceasing in 2012. Support for vulnerable schools has been provided by Thurrock's nine accredited Local Leaders of Education (LLE). National Leaders of Education (NLE) have been allocated to work on sustained programmes with 4 schools with support from the National College for school leadership. The impact of this has been removing schools from an Ofsted category or ensuring that their results rise above the government's floor standard. Leaders have historically supported newly appointed head teachers, deputy heads and new chairs of governors. 41 Thurrock schools are known to have established partnerships with others that support improvement. These are being built on further.

3.4 Features and possible direction for schools partnerships. The key features of the schools partnerships for Thurrock, consistent with the recommendations of the Education Commission, are:

- A vision that school improvement is best achieved through schools working together to provide support and challenge to each other to secure improvement across the system.
- The local authority is clear with schools about its role in relation to school improvement including having a clear school improvement strategy and playing a role that supports the partnerships, and fostering an approach that is open, where schools and children and known well, along with their priorities for improvement.
- Strong support for effective governance for every school including establishing Progress Boards and appropriate use of Interim Executive Boards to support rapid improvement.
- The Local authority playing a role of commissioning improvement work and holding schools to account.
- The partnership uses high performing schools to support development across the system, recognising the key role of Teaching Schools in improving teachers' professional development and improving the quality of teaching.
- Using National and Local Leaders of Education to work with schools and commissioning highly skilled consultants to improve quality of leadership, management and teaching.
- Pooling of resources to support improvement.
- Recognising that there are a range of partnerships such as academy chains, Church of England, Roman Catholic Church and other formalised links among schools that have strong roles in supporting improvement.
- Having good Thurrock wide governance of school improvement adopting an approach that is consistent with the Education Commission.

- 3.5 **Teaching Schools** .The Teaching School initiative evolved in 2012 and was initially one alliance in Thurrock led by Treetops (partnered with William Edwards). 15 cross-phase schools are part of this alliance working collaboratively on their collective areas of development. In April 2013 three more Teaching Schools were awarded the status; Beacon Hill (partnered with the Ockendon Academy), Harris Academy and Dilkes Academy (the one primary specialist). Each has established its own alliance with a number of neighbouring schools and academies and the LA. The Government is focussing action on raising standards of teaching and development through Teaching Schools and, with one of the highest percentage of teaching schools Thurrock, is well placed to make maximum use of them as principal providers of school to school support and school improvement commissioned by the LA.
- 3.6 In addition to the outstanding Teaching Schools there are a number of good schools with significant capacity that are already providing improvement support and challenge for others. Some of these support schools both in and out of the borough. Targeted support that the Council currently provides could be distributed further between the communities of schools adding to sustainable capacity.
- 3.7 **Progress Boards.** In order to address further areas of development within schools that ‘require improvement’ there is a strategy to support governance within those schools with a Progress Board. Experienced governors and leaders were recruited from across the Borough to service these boards which have a lifespan of 3-6 months. This funded initiative has added capacity. The impact has been improved challenge, support and an upward trajectory towards an Ofsted judgement of ‘good’ at the next inspection. There are 4 progress boards currently in operation
- 3.8 **Partnerships outside Thurrock Council.** The local authority has worked collaboratively with Southend and Essex to provide a targeted leadership and succession planning project. Through a bidding process funding has been obtained from the National College to put in place developmental leadership programme targeting new leaders across the three Local Authority areas. The impact of this has been to retain deputy heads who have then gone on to being appointed in Thurrock’s schools and academies and, on four occasions, support schools that were without a leader. Schools and academies have partnerships beyond Thurrock, all of which have an impact on educational provision for children in the borough. In a modern system it will be increasingly important to understand and respect the range of relationships schools have to support improvement.
- 3.9 **School Standards and Progress Board.** This is an officer led body that oversees and coordinates support to schools and academies across Thurrock. Its aim is to review the performance and trajectory in terms of leadership and management, quality of teaching, governance, curriculum and provision, special educational needs, exclusions, attendance and other aspects of work that impacts on achievement.

4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

Appendix 1 sets out the organisation and governance arrangements for schools in Thurrock. This illustrates the groupings of schools and their established or emerging partnerships.

- 4.1 The Education Commission report has been published and has been sent to schools, academies, the free school and other educational partners for their comments prior to setting out a detailed action plan in the New Year. The Commission makes recommendations about schools partnerships.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 5.1 This report relates to the council priority to improve the education and skills of local people.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
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In most cases collaborative working is organised through School budgets, rather than through Local Authority budgets. As the Schools landscape changes, and the majority of funding is delegated directly to Schools, the LA role is to facilitate and signpost Schools to best practice.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
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This report does not require that any decision be taken.

A duty is imposed on the Council by s13A of the Education Act (EA) 1996 duty to promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
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The suggested direction and features of schools partnerships intends to secure higher standards of achievement and progress for every child in Thurrock, making most effective use of schools achieving high standards to support and challenge those schools in need. Future reports on this and educational performance will provide a breakdown of the more granulated data regarding the performance of key groups by types of school.

6.4. Risks

Local authorities are required to have a clear approach to school improvement and are inspected by Ofsted on their impact. The effectiveness of school improvement in the borough is dependent upon a strong partnership with every type of school.

7. CONCLUSION

Thurrock needs to have a strong set of schools partnerships to improve education achievement and progress of children in the borough. Every school has a key role to play in increasing the skills levels and employability of young residents. The features and direction of the schools partnerships for improvement need to be well understood and priority placed on their development.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- Thurrock Education Commission

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1 – List of Thurrock schools by form of governance.

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