

20 December 2016		ITEM: 9
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
School Improvement Peer Review		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: All	
Report of: Rory Patterson - Director of Children's Services Roger Edwardson – Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills		
Accountable Head of Service: Roger Edwardson, Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The Eastern Region Peer Review sought to understand how Thurrock Council can continue and further develop its partnership with schools and academies to support improved outcomes and close performance gaps for all children and young people in Thurrock.

To support this focus, the council agreed a set of three further questions to be used in all discussions and interviews in the course of the review, which are listed below:-

- What do schools and academies value most in the current support and challenge provided by the School Improvement Team?
- What is the role of schools and academies in the light of the White paper?
- What is the role of the council in supporting school improvement in the light of the White Paper?

The report explores the current performance context for the council as at June 2016 and the strengths and areas for development linked to the overarching question. It sets out the council's ambition to break the inter-generational cycle of underperformance by supporting the development of free schools and the expansion of strong Multi-Academy Trusts. Through the newly created lobby unit, the cabinet member for education's lobby unit is showing strategic leadership in the development of a top class provision for Thurrock's children.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Ensure that a clear council-level analysis of performance data for all phases, including vulnerable groups is provided by the data support team and evaluate this analysis to drive strategic priorities and stakeholder understanding.**
- 1.2 Communicate clearly the council-wide school improvement priorities ensuring the golden thread between the data analysis, the Self Evaluation Form (SEF), the priorities for improvement, the 'Plan on a Page', the School Improvement Strategy and the Service Plan.**
- 1.3 Co-define with schools the descriptors of both the future role of the council, schools and the Thurrock Education Alliance in a school-led system.**
- 1.4 Develop and implement the council's monitoring role with all schools / MATs and governing boards, including the categorisation process, to ensure the council has a thorough overview of all schools.**
- 1.5 Ensure commissioned and brokered support meets the priorities for improvement for schools/academies and is regularly quality assured for impact.**
- 1.6 Develop a cross-service strategy to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** The council commissioned a peer review of support for school improvement by the Eastern Region consortium. Senior officers from Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Bedford Borough formed the team. The review was undertaken on 28th and 29th June 2016 and the findings are included in this report.

The council identified an overarching question for the review of school improvement.

How can the council continue and further develop its partnership with schools and academies to support improved outcomes and close performance gaps for groups of pupils.

During the review the following underpinning questions were discussed:-

- *What do schools value most in the current support to schools?*
- *What is the role of schools in the light of the White paper?*

- *What is the role of the council in supporting school improvement in the light of the White Paper?*

The report includes the following sections:-

- A. Introduction
- B. Current performance context for the council
- C. The strengths and areas for development linked to the overarching review question
- D. Key recommendations
- E. The follow up offers of support from peer Local Authorities

A. Introduction

The overarching question for the review was:-

How can the council continue and further develop its partnership with schools to support improved outcomes and close gaps in the light of the White Paper?

To support this focus the council agreed a set of three further questions to be used in all discussions and interviews in the course of the review, which are listed below:-

- *What do schools value most in the current support to schools?*
- *What is the role of schools in the light of the White paper?*
- *What is the role of the council in supporting school improvement in the light of the White Paper?*

The focus of the review:-

- the analysis of a range of performance data and the council documentation;
- discussions with focus groups of stakeholders encompassing members, council officers, Teaching Schools, System Leaders, Thurrock Improvement Consultants, Headteachers, and school governors
- visits to schools

The report outlined:-

- The current performance context for the council
- The strengths and areas for development linked to the overarching question
- A summary of key recommendations
- The follow up offers of support from peer Local Authorities

B. The current performance context for the Council

Following the outcomes of the Peer Review a new lobby unit has been established to advocate for more free schools and a grammar school to expand our strong MAT's; the council is shaping the conversation to further develop our skills and employment support offer.

The council is setting clear expectations for public services, giving a new focus on early years development to break generational issues by forming an integrated children's centre offer and putting a new healthy life style service in place for schools.

This means giving a clear vision and delivering on the ground, for example, new health living hubs and school capital plans. We will continue to foster school improvement links between strong and weaker schools by putting yearly funding into the Education Alliance. The policy of the council is to expand our strong schools that are in strong MAT's as much as possible to support parental choice and thus the competition that drives up standards.

Since 2009 there has been a significant improvement in the Ofsted profile of schools in Thurrock. The percentage of pupils attending a good or better primary school has increased from 30% in 2009 to 82% in June 2016. 88% of our primary schools and academies are now good or better. In secondary schools 88% of pupils are attending a good or better school.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile results have risen significantly in recent years to well above national averages and there is a three-year upward trend for all groups of disadvantaged pupils, which is as a result of the successfully targeted Thurrock Council support.

Outcomes on the year 1 phonics screening check are close to national. At Key Stage 1 and 2, outcomes are broadly in line with national averages at the expected standard. However, outcomes in 2015 at the higher levels in KS2 were slightly below national in all subjects. The percentage of children making expected progress in English and mathematics is in line with national averages and the percentage of children making more than expected progress exceeds national averages.

At Key Stage 4 there was a significant overall drop in performance in Thurrock in 2015 to below national. On closer analysis of trend data there is an emerging concern of significant drops in performance in a number of secondary schools, and the overall trend over the last four years is a decline in performance. Progress between KS2 and KS4 is a developing concern. This profile at GCSE supports the need for the council to re-instate the process of engaging with all secondary schools in an annual performance conversation.

The council faces a significant challenge in terms of closing gaps for children who have special educational needs at the end of KS4 given the 50%+ gap at GCSE %5+ A* to C including English and Maths, which is larger than the national gap. FSM gaps at the end of KS4 are close to national. The council has serious concerns about the ongoing pattern of low attainment of Children Looked After (CLA) pupils at the end of KS4. This profile supports the need for the development of a cross phase strategy to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils in Thurrock.

C. The strengths and areas for development linked to the overarching question

How can the council continue and further develop its partnership with schools to support improved outcomes and close gaps in the light of the White Paper?

Current Strengths:

1. Most of the schools involved in the review expressed a strong commitment to meeting the needs of all Thurrock children and young people reflecting a collective responsibility for improvement.
2. Elected members expressed a strong commitment to improving educational outcomes and expect a continuing role for the council in leading improvement.
3. Relationships between the council and schools are good.
4. The council is seen by schools/academies as a continuing partner in school improvement, post White Paper, in the following roles:
 - providing a high level strategic overview;
 - facilitating relationships;
 - brokering support;
 - monitoring all schools/ Multi Academy Trusts (MATs);
 - and sharing effective practice.
5. As a result of the strength of working relationships, the council is well placed to co-construct the definition of their future role in school improvement with schools.
6. Schools value the council provision of school performance data.
7. Primary schools recognize the significant impact of the council support to Early Years settings to improve outcomes at EYFS.

8. Primary schools value the support of their Thurrock Improvement Consultants (TICs).
9. Governors value the system of 'Progress Boards' to model for them a rigorous focus on school improvement and governor challenge.
10. The Teaching Schools work collaboratively with one another and the council to offer a package of support to schools.
11. Schools value highly the support from Inspire for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to students, particularly in the context of supporting the high numbers of students in Thurrock who are 'looked after' in Year 10/11.

D. Areas for development:

1. The council to continue with their focus of brokering relationships with all Thurrock schools and academies.
2. Agree, define and communicate the leadership role of the council in supporting school improvement.
3. Develop a succinct council-wide evaluation of performance data to include national comparisons and the performance of all vulnerable groups. This evaluation should drive strategic priorities and inform all stakeholders.
4. Clarify schools' understanding of the criteria and process for RAG ratings.
5. Improve the golden thread between the SEF/data analysis, strategic priorities, the 'plan on a page', the school improvement strategy and the service plan.
6. Facilitate schools' understanding of a school-led system to improve pupil outcomes, including the challenge role of Teaching Schools.
7. Quality assure the impact of support that is commissioned and/or provided by the council.
8. Ensure challenge and support is provided appropriately to all phases to fulfil the expectations of the council as champion for children and families as defined in the White Paper.
9. Develop a cross-service cohesive strategy to improve outcomes for all vulnerable groups.

E. The follow up offers of support from peer Local Authorities

Cambridgeshire: Support for developing the monitoring role of the council with all secondary schools.

Developing a school improvement board to lead school-led school improvement.

Norfolk: Support for developing a succinct council-wide evaluation of performance data driving strategic priorities.

Support for improving schools' understanding of a school-led system.

Bedford Borough: Support with developing a cross-service strategy to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.

Support with developing the challenge role in school-to-school support strategies.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Key Issues: Using the offers of support above

- 3.1 There is a need to further focus on the performance of vulnerable groups using data provided by the Schools Business Intelligence Team and evaluate this analysis to drive strategic priorities.
- 3.2 Working in partnership with schools and academies there is a need to co-define the descriptors of both the future role of the council, schools and the Thurrock Education Alliance in a school-led system.
- 3.3 Develop and implement the council's monitoring role with all schools / MATs and governing boards, including the categorisation process, to ensure the council has a thorough overview of all schools.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 None.

5. Impact on Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact

- 5.1 None.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
**Finance Manager, Corporate Finance –
Children and Adult's**

There are no direct implications in this report.

We need to consider, as part of the partnership with our schools and academies, the need to develop an income generation model as part of the Thurrock Education Alliance arrangements.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

This is a report for noting only; no decision is required. The Authority has statutory duties regarding education in respect of all children within its area. These apply whether or not the Council maintains the school. Many are contained within the Education Act 1996 (the Act) and include s13A, which requires local authorities to promote high standards, ensure fair access to opportunity for education and training and promote the fulfilment of learning potential by resident pupils up to the age of 20 including those with special educational needs. The function of school improvement comes from this general duty and is the subject of an Ofsted inspection regime.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development

This report sets out the findings from the School Improvement Peer Review with accompanying recommendations to support improved outcomes for all children and young people in Thurrock including Children Looked After and other vulnerable groups.

7. Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

8. Risks

None

9. Conclusion

As part of the Eastern Region Peer Review the council identified how they should continue and further develop its partnership working with schools and academies to support improved outcomes and close performance gaps for groups of pupils.

During the review the following issues arose:-

- schools explained what they valued most in the current support to schools and academies and
- how the council might further support school improvement in the light the majority of schools being academies or in the process of academisation.

The Peer Review also informed the refreshed “Plan on a Page” (attached)

10. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- SI Peer Review
- SI Peer Review feedback report

11. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Plan on a Page

Report Author:

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Children’s Services