

10 November 2015		ITEM: 5
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
School improvement in Thurrock- the Impact of School to School Support		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: All	
Report of: Roger Edwardson – Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills Andrea Winstone – School Improvement Officer		
Accountable Head of Service: Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The Council set up the Education Commission to review education provision and to consider how progress and performance could be accelerated in Thurrock. The success of recent years and the opportunities presented in the area by regeneration and the arts has encouraged all involved in education to work collaboratively and raise standards. This report provides evidence of the whole education community working together to shape a better future for children and young people across Thurrock.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the innovative and effective working relationships between schools, academies and the local authority and the positive impact on school improvement.**
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider this report in conjunction with the Multi-Academy Trust Relationship report of the same date.**

2. Introduction and Background:

Thurrock has a diverse school community with a strong emphasis on high performance and improvement. Over the past five years there has been evidence of strong improvement of schools and academies in Ofsted judgements and a strong trajectory of improvement in attainment in primary schools. There have been a number of initiatives to ensure that the corporate priority to “Create a great place for learning” is at the centre of all that we do. Working with schools to attract high quality sponsors, fostering a thriving school to school support structure and driving up governance are key.

Seven of the 52 schools are community schools maintained by the local authority. All of the local authority maintained schools are primary schools – apart from Treetops Special School.

Eight of the 52 schools have a faith connection (five Catholic and three Church of England). Six of these schools are voluntary aided, one is voluntary controlled and one is a Church of England Foundation school. There are two primary free schools in Thurrock .

The remainder of the schools have become either sponsored or converter academies. Many of these academies are part of multi or umbrella academy trusts. The academy chains are a mix of those led by educational sponsors embracing groups of academies that extend beyond Thurrock, and those that at this point just comprise schools in Thurrock.

The proportion of schools that have become academies is high relative to the rest of the country where around 60 per cent of secondary schools and 10 percent of primary schools have become academies. In part, this is because the local authority has supported and facilitated schools to convert to academy status. It has also been open in welcoming academy sponsors to play a significant role in school improvement and has been supportive of strong schools in the borough sponsoring other schools that need improvement support.

Schools in Thurrock have been on a significant path of improvement. In 2010 only 33% of primary schools were good or outstanding. In October 2015, 72% of primary schools are ‘good or better’ and 75% of children attend primary schools that are ‘good or better’ (up from 2009). As the Ofsted inspection cycle has slowed down, the local authority anticipates that there are a number of schools which would be judged good which have not yet had a recent inspection. However only one primary school is judged ‘outstanding’. Currently there are no schools judged to be inadequate in Thurrock. In the secondary sector, three are judged ‘outstanding’, whilst five are judged ‘good’ and two that ‘requires improvement’. One school has no current judgement. Both the special schools are judged ‘outstanding’ and the pupil support service which includes medical tuition and the primary and secondary Pupil

Referral Unit has no current judgement since being sponsored by Olive Academies Trust in April 2015.

Thurrock seeks to have a forward thinking approach to school improvement. This includes:

- School led improvement – schools providing analysis, challenge and support to each other to effect rapid and sustained improvement. Teaching schools and good and outstanding schools, stand-alone academies, academy chains and free schools providing capacity and school improvement strategies for others with the ambition to ensure all schools are good or better by the end of the academic year 2016/17
- School driven initial teacher training, continuous professional development and recruitment
- Driving LA wide performance issues, such as improving progress and attainment from key stages 1 to the end of key stage 2
- Driving practice to support pupils qualifying for the pupil premium
- Driving practice to support initiatives gap in mathematics, English and languages for students studying these subjects at A level
- Ensuring that the benefits of more schools becoming academies are used well to ensure to support rapid improvement e.g. making best use of the capacity of academy chains and partnerships and the use of teaching schools

2.1 **Thurrock Education Alliance (TEA) and the Thurrock Education Network (TEN)**

TEA meets termly to oversee school performance and to consider bids from strategic groups for funding from the Education Commission Budget for school improvement projects. Bids are submitted on a pro-forma application form and are considered and scored against a set success criteria. (Appendix 1)

Approved bids are forwarded to TEA for commissioning, monitoring and evaluation of the projects. TEN evaluate the impact so far of projects and award a RAG rating through the project monitoring forms that are submitted by the project leads. This information is then reported to TEA.

An example of a project is the joint bids by both primary and secondary sectors to commission a Recruitment and Retention Strategy in order to address recruitment and retention issue experienced in Thurrock. An ex-headteacher of two Thurrock secondary schools, with extensive knowledge of the local issues, has been appointed and is in the process of producing a joint

strategy to be published in November. There has been significant interest in this from both Southend and Essex Councils.

2.2 **Strategic Groups**

The strategic groups are a prime example of school to school support in Thurrock, where schools and academies work together without boundaries to achieve a common goal. (See below the list of strategic groups) An example of this is the Thurrock Primary assessment Tool project which is led by Rhys Latham at Dilkes Primary Teaching School Alliance and funded through a bid to TEA. A number of primary schools and the School Improvement Officer (SIO) worked together to develop an assessment tool which has been shared via a secure website. This website is free to use for Thurrock schools and there will be a charge for non-Thurrock schools which will allow sustainability of the website. The site had received over 1000 hits in the first half term and has led to an increase in teacher confidence in levelling pupils' writing and identifying next steps. This will ultimately have an impact of increased pupil progress in writing in primary schools.

All of the strategic groups meet regularly to discuss the key areas for development.

Strategic Groups:

THPA- Thurrock Primary Heads Association
TASS- Thurrock Association Secondary Heads
TAG- Thurrock Association of Governors
0-11 Strategy Group
11-19 Strategy Group
DPTSA- Dilkes Primary Teaching School Alliance
TTSA- Thurrock Teaching School Alliance
HACH- Harris Federation Teaching School

2.4 **Teaching School Alliances (TSA)**

(Please see appendix 3)

The Teaching School Alliance leads meet with the School Improvement Officer termly to identify schools which may require school to school support using most recent data, from the council data and performance team, Ofsted reports, council monitoring and school's own information. The information is used to support 'School to School' support bids to The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). School-to-school support fund provides grants for teaching schools and national leaders of education (NLEs) to support school improvement by working with underperforming schools and academies.

The support provided helps improve school performance, through time-limited intervention by system leaders. Funding is awarded to teaching schools and schools with a designated National Leader of Education to support schools

judged by Ofsted as “requires improvement” and academies with “requires improvement” or “inadequate” judgements.

A number of school-to-school support bids have been approved and granted to date which have resulted in improvements in all of the schools and academies supported e.g. Benyon Primary, Hathaway Academy, Quarry Hill Primary and Stifford Clays Primary. This term four more schools and academies have been identified for support and the teaching schools are submitting bids for the current application round which closes at the end of November.

The teaching schools publish a list of the Subject Leaders in Education (SLE) they have available to support schools on their own and the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) websites. SLEs can also be brokered as part of LA intervention for schools falling below the Government floor standards. Thurrock is extremely fortunate to have over 35 SLEs available currently who can support on almost every national curriculum subject.

All three TSAs and their strategic partners contribute to the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer in Thurrock. An annual brochure of high quality CPD is circulated to all schools and academies in the borough.

Teaching schools work to six key areas known as ‘The Big Six’

“The Big Six”:

1. Teacher training and new entrants to the profession – developing Initial Teacher Training (ITT) opportunities for all schools, and becoming involved in the School Direct programme.
2. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – providing high quality, value for money CPD for all schools.
3. Talent spotting and develop leadership potential. Where are Thurrock’s next Headteachers and how do we retain them in the borough? Developing a cohesive approach to leadership training and succession planning.
4. Providing support for schools by schools – using the best practice locally to support developing practice; enabling professional colleagues to collaborate and learn from each other.
5. Designating and brokering Specialist Leaders in Education (SLEs) – sharing expertise and developing coaching across all of Thurrock’s schools.
6. Engaging in research and development – developing exciting and innovative pedagogy and leadership through our bespoke Masters programme, and other research and development opportunities.

The Three TSAs and Thurrock School Improvement Team work with the NCTL to meet ‘The Big Six’ in Thurrock.

2.5. **Wave 8/9 Funding**

NCTL funding is allocated to Southend, Essex and Thurrock to use collaboratively to improve recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders.

William Edwards, in collaboration with Belmont Castle Academy commissioned a cross borough conference in July 2015 using wave 8 funding. (There have been 7 previous “waves” of the scheme).

2.6 **School Triads**

Schools and academies have formed new partnerships to promote raising standards across the borough. This has proven mutually beneficial for many of the three school/academy partnerships. Each partnership was invited to identify the particular strengths which could be shared and also agree areas for further development. In order to encourage a shared understanding each Triad was formed with the specific phase, primary or secondary phase (including Special Schools). (see appendix 4 for details provided by each TRIAD). This is a research evidenced method for improving performance in schools and has been welcomed by local schools who have been open and constructive with each other in jointly working on school developments.

3. **Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

None.

4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

Thurrock has a forward thinking and diverse approach to school improvement which harnesses best practice in schools, strong school to school support, and challenge from the local authority, strategic groups and from each other to drive improvement.

5. **Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

This area of activity supports the corporate priority of creating a great place for learning.

6. **Implications**

6.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Corporate Finance, Quality Assurance Team

There are no financial implications in this report.

6.2 **Legal**

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

This report is for consideration only. The Committee is not required to make any decisions.

6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development

The author notes the positive contribution cross school collaboration can bring to supporting a positive learning environment for all children. Work to support vulnerable children and disadvantaged groups is incorporated into all streams of work.

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

None.

7. **Conclusion**

With a strong trajectory of good Ofsted judgements, many of Thurrock schools are in a good position to identify high quality support which can be offered to support other schools working in collaboration with the local authority. This is evidenced in a number of different approaches in the body of the report.

8. **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):

None.

9. **Appendices to the report**

Education Strategic Priorities 2015-2016

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