

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

19 AUGUST 2014

REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND SUPPORT
The Local Authority's Plans

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. On 15 July 2014, The Executive was updated on progress made against the Local Authority's school improvement post inspection action plan. Then, on 16 July, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel considered information on the Local Authority's plans in respect of school improvement and support. This report conveys an overview of the findings of the panel and details recommendations for The Executive's consideration.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In January 2014, Ofsted undertook an inspection of the Local Authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement.
3. The inspection was carried out because of concerns about:
 - The achievement and progress of pupils in primary and secondary schools;
 - The quality of education and training for young people aged 16 to 18;
 - The proportions of school leavers in Middlesbrough who continue their education, or enter employment or training, are far lower than averages regionally and nationally.
4. There are only two judgements in the inspection framework: effective and ineffective. Ofsted reported that the Local Authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement are ineffective.
5. In response to the inspection findings, a post inspection action plan was developed detailing the Local Authority's proposals to tackle issues raised by the inspection. The document was sent to Ofsted who later provided an evaluation of the plan; this conveyed a number of strengths and areas where the action plan required further development. Ofsted has confirmed that there is no requirement to resubmit the plan.
6. The Local Authority arrangements for school improvement require re-inspection within nine to 12 months.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

7. The Assistant Director for Learning and Skills provided a general overview of the feedback received from Ofsted and a detailed outline of the actions that the Local Authority intends to take to improve education provision in Middlesbrough.

Attainment

8. It was conveyed to Members that the Local Authority accepted Ofsted's judgement, as Middlesbrough is in the bottom quartile for all the national indicators. It was highlighted that during the past year, the Middlesbrough Achievement Partnership (MAP) has undertaken multi-agency work to address the barriers to achievement; however it is still too early to show an impact.
9. Members were informed that Ofsted was very clear that it compared all indicators against the national average and the local context, such as high levels of deprivation, was not taken into consideration. It was highlighted that out of a total of seven inspections, only two Local Authorities had been judged effective and most of their indicators had been in line with or above national averages.
10. The scrutiny panel was advised that there is a distinct difference between levels of attainment at primary and secondary education in Middlesbrough, however the Ofsted report had stated that attainment at every key stage was below the national average. This was not true; at Key Stage 2 (age 11), the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 and above in reading, writing and maths was 1% above the national average in 2013.
11. Upon receiving a document showing the provisional results for primary schools for 2014, Members were advised that the rate of improvement was promising, especially the numbers achieving level 5+. However, it was noted that there is a different profile of children in Middlesbrough secondary schools to those in primary schools. The scrutiny panel was advised that Macmillan is the only secondary school where every year group's prior attainment is above the national average, and three schools are significantly below it. However, this did not fully explain the 9% shortfall against the national average for 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and maths. It was identified that a substantial number of pupils who attained a 'good level 4' at Key Stage 2 are not achieving the expected grade C or above at GCSE level. It was highlighted that in 2013 across the town there were 171 pupils who achieved a level 4B or above in Key Stage 2 English but did not get a grade C at GCSE. In maths, 102 pupils who should have achieved grade C, did not.

Academies

12. Members heard that Ofsted noted that historically Middlesbrough did not have a town-wide target. However, Middlesbrough's model of education since 2012 has been to ensure maximum delegation to schools, support conversion to academy status, recognise increased autonomy and promote school-led improvement through the Middlesbrough Schools' Teaching Alliance (MSTA) and MAP. It was conveyed that all schools and academies in Middlesbrough are part of MAP. Guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to Schools Causing Concern outlined that the Local Authority is responsible for challenging schools and intervening if they do not perform well enough.
13. Members heard that where an academy does not demonstrate an ability to make rapid improvements to meet the required standards, the Local Authority will discharge its duty by raising concerns directly with the DfE.
14. The scrutiny panel was advised that there are now more than 3,500 academies across the country and the Government is in the process of establishing Regional School Commissioners who will be responsible for monitoring academies in eight patches; each will have a Management Board. Head teachers of successful academies will be elected to sit on the Boards.

15. Members were advised that Middlesbrough representatives had met with the Rt Hon David Laws MP, Minister of State for Schools at the DfE, and explained that five of Middlesbrough's secondary schools are academies and the Local Authority cannot improve in the secondary sector unless the academies also improve. The Assistant Director for Learning and Skills felt that the meeting had been productive and positive feedback on the action plan was received.

School improvement post inspection action plan

16. In considering the Ofsted letter dated 4 February, conveying the inspection findings, the panel received information on how the Local Authority will improve cross-sector relationships (particularly in transition), rigorously use data to target resources, sharpen plans by the use of specific success criteria and further develop the role of elected members and governors.
17. The plan sets out the actions that the Local Authority intends to take to deal with the six areas for improvement highlighted by the Ofsted inspection. Members received information on the areas and the key actions which will address them:

Establishing closer relationships between primary and secondary schools

Key actions

- A School Effectiveness Strategy (SES) is being developed. It was conveyed that the SES will define the roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority and schools, setting out a joint understanding of how the Local Authority will fulfil its statutory duty to secure school improvement and promote better outcomes for children and young people. The SES will set out the strategies and interventions that will have the greatest impact on the priorities identified from the data analysis at school and Local Authority level. Targeted areas include: early intervention; language development; reading at Key Stages 1 and 2; secondary school outcomes at Key Stages 4 and 5; improving the number of young people in education, employment and training; further developing outstanding teaching & learning and leadership & management; use of data for improvement; transition; recruitment and retention of the best staff; improving attendance; reducing exclusions; improving the performance of vulnerable learners and raising pupil and parental aspirations. Members were advised that the final consultation with schools, with regards to the content of the SES, is scheduled for the beginning of September.
- Middlesbrough Schools Teaching Alliance (MSTA), via its research and development strand, has been commissioned to audit current transition activity including data transfer, and establish policy and procedure in relation to the future transitional activities for Key Stage 2/3.
- The Mayor held a meeting with secondary head teachers. Members were advised that this meeting was one of a series held between the Local Authority and the secondary head teachers. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss key data on attainment and progress, in addition to developing intensive interventions to pick up the pace of improvement.
- All primary schools have provided secondary schools with detailed sub-level data for Y6 leavers and examples of their work.
- Secondary head teachers are working to create a Secondary School Improvement Partnership. Members heard that the partnership will employ a Senior Lead and two subject experts for each of three key subjects: English, maths and science. The role of the partnership will be to improve the quality of teaching across all secondary schools and academies across the town. The partnership will be funded for a period of one year by the Schools Management Forum; the

subject experts will be required to embed best practice in the schools to achieve sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.

Ensure that school improvement services make rigorous use of data and information, so that they have a clearer understanding of the specific challenges faced by individual schools and can target resources and personnel effectively

Key Actions

- A review of school improvement capacity has been undertaken and is to be implemented shortly.
- Data sharing between schools and the Local Authority has improved, ensuring the existing forward-looking approach in the primary sector is extended to secondary schools. Primary schools have agreed to provide their targets for 2015 to the Local Authority and secondary schools have submitted their GCSE predictions for 2014.
- A schedule of data releases including roles, responsibilities and key actions will result in Local Authority staff and schools sharing a consistent approach to data use.
- There is now a wider awareness of timing of data and this is used to identify areas of underperformance resulting in earlier intervention in schools causing concern.
- The MSTA will further develop the existing data protocol and the SES will provide details of the protocol, which will enable a more proactive approach to intervention.
- Evidence will be collated to establish the impact of interventions on attainment and this will be made available to schools and partners.
- The improvement process will be built on a risk assessment approach using the latest data for an agreed key indicator set, analysed in September each year. Schools will be categorised to identify appropriate levels of support for maintained schools.

Build on the emerging partnerships between schools, colleges and the business community by producing a coherent strategy to increase the numbers of school leavers in education, employment or training

Key Actions

- The Youth Employment working group has been commissioned to produce a 14-25 strategy which addresses curriculum development, employability and NEETs. The strategy will set out the Council's approach to increasing the availability of jobs in the local area and ensuring that school leavers have the skills to gain employment in existing and emerging industries.
- A Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) has been introduced to identify pupils requiring additional support at an earlier stage.
- Labour market trends and understanding the economic needs of the area will inform the implementation of the 14-25 strategy and curriculum design.
- The provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in educational settings will be reviewed to ensure all students have access to relevant information and advice.

Establish clearer systems for monitoring the quality of school governance across the authority, in order to strengthen this aspect of school leadership.

Key Actions

- A review of the operating model for the Governor Development Service will support early identification of declining standards of governance and clarify the Local Authority's role in securing quality of governance. Governor feedback mechanisms will also be revised and formalised.
- The approach outlined in the SES will include challenge and support for governing bodies.
- A process will be agreed to formally identify underperformance in governance bodies using a Self Evaluation Framework (SEF).
- A schedule of briefings will be developed to ensure governors are kept informed of MAP and MSTA developments and opportunities for engagement.
- An analysis of training needs will be undertaken to identify strengths and areas for development in order to tailor training.
- The Executive Member will undertake a review of Local Authority representatives on governing bodies.

Improve the quality of the local authority's plans so that they have clear and measurable targets that can be used systematically to monitor progress, assess impact and judge the value for money resulting from the investments made by the Council and partners

Key Actions

- The SES will include targets and milestones, with a strong focus on improving Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4.
- Progress against milestones has been built into the performance management system and will be monitored on a quarterly basis through performance clinics.

Ensure that elected members have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in education, so that they can hold schools and school improvement services fully to account

Key Actions

- An annual schedule will be prepared outlining decisions on school improvement issues to be taken by the Executive and the Executive Member.
- The Executive Member will report to Council on school improvement matters.
- A programme of briefings will be held to develop elected members' knowledge of school performance measures, data analysis and developments in education.
- As previously stipulated, the Executive Member will undertake a review of Local Authority representatives on governing bodies. Regular communications will be established between the Executive Member and Local Authority representatives.
- A review of the extent of challenge by scrutiny, to schools, will be undertaken.

RESPONSE TO OFSTED'S EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT POST INSPECTION ACTION PLAN

18. As previously indicated, the Regional Director from Ofsted provided an evaluation of the action plan, highlighting its strengths and areas where the action plan required further development. Ofsted has confirmed that there is no requirement to resubmit the plan and it is a decision of the Local Authority whether to make amendments following the feedback. The Assistant Director for Learning and Skills provided further explanation as to the areas that are identified as requiring further development:

Explicit targets

19. It was highlighted by Ofsted that the action plan lacked explicit targets in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 1 and 2 and key attainment measures at Key Stage 4. It was confirmed that the Local Authority will include these targets in the School Effectiveness Strategy rather than the improvement plan, as the SES is the prime document on which improvement activity will be based in the next two years.

Responsibility for quality assurance procedures

20. Members were advised that the Local Authority believes that quality assurance procedures are clear, as the name of the person responsible for monitoring and evaluating each of the actions taken is stated in the plan.

Governor recruitment and the high number of vacancies

21. Members were informed with regard to governor recruitment, the Local Authority does not agree that there was a high number of vacancies when the Ofsted inspection was carried out in January, because four schools were in the process of converting to academies. Therefore, vacancies were not filled until the governing bodies of the new academies were constituted. This particular set of circumstances had been highlighted to Ofsted but had not been included in its report. However, the Local Authority is monitoring governor vacancies as there are fluctuations.

Greater urgency

22. It was conveyed that Ofsted has identified that greater urgency is required in some areas, such as an analysis of governor training needs and the production of the 14-25 Strategy. It was clarified that there is a capacity issue; with limited staffing, care has to be taken to spread actions for each officer across the period of the plan to make them achievable. The School Improvement Team consists of only 2.4 FTE advisers and the interim School Improvement Specialist.

Targets not sufficiently ambitious

23. The scrutiny panel was advised that in relation to the reduction of NEET figures and the improvement of secondary conversion rates, Ofsted stated that the targets cited were not always sufficiently ambitious. In response, Middlesbrough has commissioned the Youth Employment working group to produce the 14-25 strategy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

24. A Panel Member noted that one of the targeted areas was recruitment and retention of staff, and this related particularly to head teachers. It was suggested that the use of recruitment

agencies and more innovative, less traditional, approaches to recruitment might improve the field of applicants for head teacher posts.

CONCLUSIONS

25. Based on the evidence given throughout the meeting the panel concluded that:
- a) Raising educational attainment across the town is one of the most important challenges that the Local Authority faces.
 - b) The Local Authority has lead responsibility for promoting high standards and championing education excellence.
 - c) The post inspection improvement plan demonstrates effective plans to challenge underperformance, intervening early and taking robust action to tackle failure. All partners are determined to secure prompt and sustainable improvement through the actions identified in the plan.
 - d) Positive progress has been made against the action plan, however, the scrutiny panel was of the view that:
 - Actions, to further strengthen the quality of leadership and teaching in schools, need to be developed; and
 - Actions relating to the leadership of elected members need to be enhanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

Involvement of Ward Councillors

- a) That measures be implemented to encourage elected members to develop active and supportive links with the schools in their ward.

Involvement of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel

- b) That the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel receive quarterly updates on the progress made against the Local Authority's school improvement post inspection action plan.
- c) That, at the end of each academic year, performance data pertaining to all schools, is reported to the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.
- d) That a mechanism is implemented whereby, when a school is facing special measures and/or underperformance, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel is notified, enabling it to request a meeting with the head teacher and chair of governors to gain a clearer appreciation of the support and challenge the school requires.

Head Teachers and Teachers

- e) That, Middlesbrough's schools and teachers use the Sutton Trust & Education Endowment Fund Teaching and Learning Toolkit as guidance to enable them to effectively use their resources to improve attainment. The Toolkit is an accessible summary of educational research.

- f) That teacher evaluation is undertaken regularly which includes student performance assessments and outcome measures. Evaluation results should include substantive feedback to teachers and link results to a wide range of professional development opportunities to strengthen practice. This will ensure a continuous pathway for professional growth and development is maintained.
- g) That an evaluation system for head teachers be developed that includes multiple measures reflecting the complexity of their leadership, management and pupil support roles and is linked directly to opportunities to improve their practice.
- h) That newly appointed head teachers receive formal mentoring from more experienced and highly effective school leaders.
- i) That the causes of high head teacher turnover are analysed and support and professional development programmes are developed that can mitigate the problem.
- j) That the process for recruiting staff is reviewed with a view to increasing the number of applications received.

Best Practice

- k) That a piece of research is commissioned to look at best practice from schools, outside of Middlesbrough that have achieved excellent outcomes despite similar levels of disadvantage.

Schools Effectiveness Strategy

- l) That, the scrutiny panel's recommendations are detailed in the School Effectiveness Strategy, in addition to information enabling schools to understand the scrutiny process and how the process can bring support and challenge to schools, regardless of their governance model.

ACRONYMS

27. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

- DfE – Department for Education
- MAP – Middlesbrough Achievement Partnership
- MSTA – Middlesbrough Schools Teaching Alliance
- NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training
- SES – School Effectiveness Strategy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

28. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- Agenda papers and minutes, Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel, 16 July 2014.

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