

Report to the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 10 February 2016

Peer Review of Birmingham Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan - 16-20 November 2015

Purpose of the Report

To brief the Committee on the findings of the peer view conducted by the Local Government Association (LGA) of the Birmingham Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan

Recommendation

That Scrutiny notes:

- the findings of the peer review.
- that a refreshed improvement plan will be presented to Cabinet for approval.
- that the plan will be monitored by the Cabinet Member, Children's Services and this Scrutiny committee.

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LGA Peer Review of Birmingham Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan

1. Introduction

This report details the findings of the LGA peer review of the Birmingham Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan.

2. Background

The Birmingham Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan was published in December 2014 following a series of reports that identified serious safeguarding and governance concerns in a number of Birmingham schools.

To help us secure improvements, and as part of sector-led improvement, the LGA were commissioned to undertake this review of the above-mentioned Plan. As part of the review, a team of eight peers with relevant experience and expertise, drawn together through the LGA, undertook a range of interviews and focus groups during the week of 16-20 November 2015.

The peer team was asked to challenge our progress in implementing five of the twelve workstreams in the Plan:

- Build confidence in BCC's ability to lead the overall system of education through a relentless focus on core duties.
- Ensure that there are robust and effective governance arrangements in place and working effectively in schools.
- Work with schools to ensure that all children and young people in Birmingham learn in an environment that is safe and promotes their overall wellbeing.
- Work with partners to deliver improvements in schools.
- Drive innovation and improvement through new district structures that promote collaborative leadership and enhance accountability.

In challenging these, we asked the peers to focus on progress, outcomes and impact of our actions.

Members of the Peer Review team met with a cross-party group of Members from this Scrutiny Committee. They had also intended to meet with the Chair, Councillor Susan Barnett, however, due to illness, Councillor Barnett was unable to attend.

3. Review findings and recommendations

The key messages from the review are set out below:

The Council has made good progress in progressing work across all of the five workstreams and there is confidence amongst Members, officers and partners that the basics are being put in place for a strong and effective city-wide system of school improvement. Stronger professional leadership of the service is making a significant impact and is seen by many as crucial. Governance is now high on the agenda and has a higher profile with schools and other stakeholders. The Council provides good training and support on safeguarding and practice in data management and audits has improved. The Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) is widely regarded as the right vehicle for school improvement with good buy-in from schools. These are robust foundations for an education system that will transform the lives of children and young people.

In addition to these key messages, the review recommended some corporate reflections for the Council to consider:

- Following the leadership election, Birmingham needs to demonstrate the political will and corporate capacity to ensure its resources are focused in shaping and delivering a shared vision which reflects its ambitions for the 'the youngest city in Europe'.
- The political and managerial leadership of the city need to rigorously pursue the delivery of a shared ambition and vision for Education.
- Organisational transparency needs to be developed so that members, managers and partners can see the implementation of decisions and support growing self-awareness.
- Birmingham needs to develop a relationship with its schools that reflects its ambitions for the city and which ensures the delivery of its core responsibilities.

More detailed findings covering the Council's leadership of education, strengthening school governance, safeguarding in schools, improving schools, local leadership and accountability are set out in the **appended letter**.

The findings recommend that the City Council considers the following actions:

- Develop a clear education vision and strategy that align BCC's ambition, resources and desired outcomes for the city's children with its wider objectives.
- Provide training and development for all Members involved in scrutinising education with clear line of sight from district level to the Council leadership.

- Develop a comprehensive risk assessment for Birmingham as a whole that incorporates all settings, including information relevant to the phase and sector, and this is a shared responsibility with partners.
- Develop the intelligent client role of BCC in relation to the BEP and ensure that resources and ambitions are aligned.
- Determine an effective accountability model for BEP.
- Using learning from the Ladywood pathfinder, further develop the partnership role of BEP to enable schools to better meet the needs of young people within the city.
- Ensure that the Education Improvement Group [a forum comprising senior representatives from the City Council, Ofsted, Department for Education, BEP and the Regional Schools Commissioner's office] provides effective and timely challenge where there is evidence of poor governance in schools.
- Ensure that the Education Improvement Group facilitates clarity about respective roles and responsibilities of partners to ensure that its positive impact is sustained.
- Encourage BEP to prioritise school improvement based on a single definitive process for identification of schools and their performance.
- Ensure that BCC staff undertaking visits to settings where there are concerns have the skills and authority to take necessary action.

4. **Next steps**

The outcomes of the review are being taken into account in the future planning of children's services and a refreshed improvement plan for education.

Attachment: Letter from the LGA to Mark Rogers dated 7 December 2015