

## **REPORT OF THE IMPROVEMENT QUARTET: COUNCILLOR SIR ALBERT BORE, COUNCILLOR BRIGID JONES, MARK ROGERS AND PETER HAY**

### **EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS STRATEGY AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

#### **1. Where have we come from?**

1.1 In response to a series of reports that identified serious safeguarding and governance concerns in a number of Birmingham schools in 2014, prompted by the “Trojan Horse” letter, the Education and Schools Strategy and Improvement Plan was agreed with the Education Commissioner, Sir Mike Tomlinson, and signed off by the Improvement Quartet on 1 December 2014. A programme of work was launched at that point, with the approved document as its baseline.

1.2 The strategy was based on the following 3 strands of work:

**Getting the Basics Right:** ensuring that robust systems to underpin effective safeguarding and governance of schools are in place.

**Positioning the Council:** focussing the work of the council on delivering its core statutory education duties. This includes strengthening oversight and strategic leadership of schools and the education service.

**Improvement through Partnership:** promoting innovation, improvement, attainment and overall resilience through new models of collaboration and system leadership with all partners working with children and young people.

1.3 This was to be delivered via 11 workstreams:

1. Safeguarding in Schools.
2. Strengthening School Governance.
3. Our Leadership in Education.
4. Improving our Schools.
5. Local Leadership and Accountability.
6. Alternative Delivery Models.
7. Special Education Needs and Disabilities.
8. Educational Infrastructure.
9. Early Years Provision.
10. Recruitment & Retention.
11. Communications.

- 1.4 The programme was subsequently expanded (in July 2015) to cover workstream 12: Equality and Community Cohesion.

## 2. What have we achieved?

- 2.1 The programme has made strong progress on the delivery of the original 134 actions (and the 18 actions added for workstream 12).

- 2.2 The following priorities have guided this work:

- strengthening safeguarding in schools.
- improving governance in schools.
- developing a new way of working so that all data available on schools is analysed and in the round rather than silos via the new Education Data Dashboard (EDD).
- commissioning the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) to deliver the Council's duties under the Schools Causing Concern guidance and broader school improvement work.
- the delivery of a Curriculum Entitlement Statement (including the underpinning legal framework and guidance) for Birmingham schools in September 2015 to ensure that school leaders and governors are fully supported in dealing with any pressures to narrow the curriculum.

- 2.3 The **Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP)** is a school-led organisation, working to build a robust and ambitious system of continuous improvement, building on existing strengths amongst Birmingham schools and school leadership. BEP will ensure that no school is isolated or unsupported. BEP will also have a developing safeguarding role and will work with early help and children's social care to improve the whole system. The City Council has commissioned BEP to deliver the school improvement function from September 2015. The Council is offering full support to BEP over this term to ensure it gets off to a strong start.

- 2.4 The **Education Data Dashboard (EDD)** has been used within the Council since April 2015 (for the cross-cutting examination of schools where there is a range of risks and potential vulnerability). The dashboard includes a wide range of hard and soft data and, for the first time, pulls this together into one place. A version of EDD went live at the beginning of September to support all service areas including BEP delivery. The EDD was shared with schools in Birmingham at a major event at the National Motorcycle museum in June 2015 and since September 2015 the Council data held within EDD for individual schools has been shared with each school.

- 2.5 **The Birmingham Curriculum statement** was sent out to schools at the start of the new term in September 2015 with an introduction from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and a clear expectation that it is adopted by all schools.

- 2.6 **The Council has improved communications with schools** and launched a new School Noticeboard published every week during term time. The first edition included a document summarising the Council's Core Education Offer to schools. The Council's traded services to schools offer will follow shortly. All new headteachers in the city are

now contacted and visited by a senior officer within the first months of the school year. All new heads, including acting heads, are invited to the successful Headteacher Induction programme.

- 2.7 Effective working relations with DfE, West Midlands Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and OfSTED have been improved by the establishment of the **Education Improvement Group (EIG)** which meets monthly in Birmingham. Senior representatives from all agencies meet to ensure partners are fully briefed on progress delivering the Improvement Plan and to assess progress with the 21 schools inspected during the Trojan Horse round in 2014. Additionally, where there are shared concerns and risks in other schools/academies judged to require improvement or special measures, risks and actions are considered and planned together. The Chief Executive of BEP now attends these meetings. Additionally, where there are concerns regarding individual governors or members of staff in schools, there is regular contact between the Council and the DfE Due Diligence and Counter Extremism Group (DDCEG) to ensure a joined up approach to managing risk.
- 2.8 The programme has had a strong focus on output delivery in year one. By the end of October the programme was reporting 85% completed actions overall, with strong progress maintained for the priority areas of safeguarding (98%) and governance (97%). For year two, from January 2016, the emphasis moves towards embedding the programme, ensuring sustainability and assessing impact and securing outcomes.
- 2.9 The Council has commissioned DfE advisers to undertake an early review of the impact of the work to improve safeguarding and governance. Their recommendations have been incorporated into the programme to improve the delivery of these themes. They continue to offer support to the workstream leads for safeguarding and governance. It is recognised that the former area is over-dependent on a small number of posts to sustain safeguarding and resilience and this is being addressed by looking at extra resources in these areas.
- 2.10 A major LGA Peer review of the programme took place 16-20 November 2015 to test the progress and impact of the programme via extensive fieldwork with headteachers, chairs of governors, school business managers and a range of external partners. Feedback will be used to inform the next set of improvement actions.
- 2.11 A survey of schools' views of the Council's education services was introduced in autumn term 2014. For the first time in summer term 2015, there were significant improvements in the percentage of schools which view leadership of education and the delivery of school improvement via BEP as effective or highly effective.
- 2.12 The Council has established improved communications around clarity on the Core Offer and Traded Services.
- 2.13 In year one the strategy and plan has made strong progress completing deliverables and making changes during 2015.

### 3. What next?

- 3.1 In order to ensure that BEP's work on school improvement is held to account by the Council, the contract will be monitored carefully with new arrangements in place by February 2016.
- 3.2 Work to improve the functioning of the **Schools Forum** is also underway. There is a three point action plan that addresses:
  - the introduction of a strategic overview of how schools in Birmingham are performing.
  - improving and quality assuring finance papers with the support of EFA.
  - improving relationships between members of the Schools Forum and officers.
- 3.3 Work continues to establish full clarity on the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant and Education Services Grant.
- 3.4 Additionally, the Council's Audit team has begun a schedule of review work with schools to test good practice relating to safeguarding, governance and finance, with termly reports due as the reviews take place. This work started in September 2015, with a plan to have visited all Council maintained schools within 3 years.
- 3.5 It is anticipated that there will be a Local Authority School Improvement inspection, by summer term 2016, and that will test progress of the newly commissioned contract with BEP.
- 3.6 Long term leadership of the education service will be secured by the appointment of a permanent Executive Director of Education. The interim Executive Director of Education will continue for the full school year 2015/16 to ensure there is a strong handover and continuity of approach.
- 3.7 Now that the Improvement Plan actions are largely in place and, overall, Birmingham's maintained schools and academies are safer places, there is a stronger focus on identifying risks to children in other education settings such as independent schools. In September, the City Council met with DfE, RSC and OfSTED to discuss and form an action plan regarding risks in the city's independent schools. All independent schools in the city are being invited to a meeting with the Education Commissioner, Interim Executive Director of Education and colleagues from safeguarding and community cohesion. OfSTED inspections have revealed further risks this term. A similar meeting with the leaders of supplementary schools is planned.
- 3.8 The Council and the Education Commissioner will review the resources available to support school improvement to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the education system to ensure the intended outcomes of continuous school improvement are achieved.
- 3.9 The vision and future operating model (FOM) for education is still being developed and is needed to fully embed the changes from the programme and plan the next phase of

changes for 2016/17. This will form the new single plan for 2016/17. In line with the statutory guidance on the role of the Director of Children's Services it will be important that the FOM exploits the obvious synergies of being located in a Directorate for People whilst having, nevertheless, a strong identity and presence in its own right.

- 3.10 The dependency on improvements in children's safeguarding and social care is critical, particularly with respect to children missing from education and the responsiveness to schools of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) when concerns about a child are raised.
- 3.11 The findings from the November 2015 LGA Peer Review and the Council Audit work from September 2015 will help inform understanding of the impact of the programme.
- 3.12 The Local Safeguarding Children Board's Education Sub-Group is being refreshed under the overall direction of the Interim Executive Director of Education.
- 3.13 A stronger education presence will be established in the MASH via the deployment of senior staff whose experience and skills are in the education/schools field.
- 3.14 The new single plan will encompass actions to:
- complete the outstanding (not completed) actions from the original plan.
  - address any reported deficiencies in outcomes from the Council Audit and LGA peer review work.

## **Conclusion**

There has been substantial progress in putting in place and strengthening mechanisms and support for safeguarding and good governance in schools and feedback from schools indicates this is welcome and making a positive difference. There is greater clarity around the education leadership, challenge and support role of the local authority and other parts of the system, with the Birmingham Education Partnership commissioned to deliver the school improvement function in a context of high expectations for the children and young people of the city.

The next phase of work will focus on the impact and effectiveness of the arrangements now in place and the design and sustainability of the Council's oversight of the system and championing of the education of Birmingham's children and young people.

## **MOTION**

That progress is noted and welcomed.