

Schools, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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BEP Report after a first year of contracted School Improvement Activity

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1 Context

a) The BCC contract

Launched in November 2013 with minimal funds BEP spent much of its time and energy in the following year preparing for Sept 2015 when it began a first year of full operation as the provider of school improvement services for BCC. What was first envisaged as a five year arrangement and then commissioned for three years, is now reduced to work that will end on August 31st 2017.

The contract for school improvement has at its heart the D of E guidance regarding schools causing concern and so BEP is primarily engaged in support and challenge for all maintained schools that are judged by OfSTED either to require improvement or to be in Special Measures. In addition, due to OfSTED time lag and inconsistency, BEP identifies and intervenes with schools that have poor outcomes or that are at risk of failing.

Beyond the core LA duties around failing schools BEP's second most significant contractual responsibility is to ensure that no school is left isolated. The negative spotlight that was shone on Birmingham schools in 2014 highlighted the extent to which some schools were vulnerable through isolation and the weak intelligence held centrally about schools. To address this BEP has prioritised the development of a district strategy ensuring that all 446 schools are subdivided into units of approximately 45 and are known by their appointed district lead. To counter the variability of Birmingham's variable primary consortia and secondary networks, several of which have ceased functioning, district working has ensured a universal invitation for all heads to engage in a supportive network of colleagues.

The third dimension to the contract was that BEP should support the wider agendas of Early Help, safeguarding and effective inclusion through championing partnership working. The Ladywood pathfinder project was one expression of this aspiration and success measures were framed in terms of such key indicators as pupil exclusions and young people at 16 – 18 who are NEET.

b) BEP priorities and Membership

Alongside and independent of the BCC contract, BEP has 360 member schools and a governance structure that seeks to ensure that BEP is shaped by and accountable to the whole family of Birmingham schools.

Since one of its initial aims was to unite and hold together the whole family of Birmingham Schools so that all our pupils benefit from a deeply good social, civic as well as

academic education. To this end BEP is built around a notion of outreach rather than membership. Repeatedly good things that emanate from BEP are offered to all regardless of membership. Indeed paying for membership is largely aimed at a school aligning itself with BEP's moral purpose more than it is a school investing in commercially advantageous individual membership benefits. As BEP moves towards being fully traded this is set to change.

BEP member benefits are described in the attached prospectus (Appendix 1). Key activities include BEP's peer review programme. 140 schools have joined the programme, committing to clusters of schools annually reviewing each other and engaging in subsequent school improvement projects. This is open to all Birmingham schools, at a reduced cost to members.

c) 2015-16 Review

i) Impact in supported schools

The disconnect between the support process and eventual sponsorship solutions has been central to problems in a small number of schools. The recent fiasco at Baverstock shows that academies as well as maintained schools can suffer from this policy failure.

Even in these most difficult of cases BEP can evidence positive impact in securing interim leadership and stabilisation while potential sponsors politic / trade / carry out due diligence.

KS4 data reflects the fact that every secondary school receiving support through BEP has made clear progress between 2015 and 2016. With the exceptions of two highly contentious OfSTED inspections in summer 2016, all OfSTED judgements have reflected our accurate assessments of schools and the positive progress being made. The variability seen with new assessment arrangements and the KS2 data we currently hold does not allow the same clear mapping of success and the turmoil experienced within the primary phase.

ii) KS2 results

80% of all primary schools and 68% of all secondary schools are rated as good or outstanding. The direction of travel in recent inspections 43% of schools improved in their most recent outcomes while 14% deteriorated. The numbers of schools in Special Measures is now 4 primary 6 secondary and 1 Special school. This is one less than this time last year. The number of schools requiring improvement has reduced by 7 since last year (all primary schools). The number of pupils in less than good schools has fallen by over 2,000 in the last year.

Primary 2016 data shows an improving picture in EYFS and phonics on previous years, however the rate of improvement is not as great as that seen nationally and the gap has widened against national figures.

In 2016 Key Stage 1 and 2 assessments are the first which assess the new, more challenging national curriculum which was introduced in 2014. New tests and interim frameworks for teacher assessment have been introduced to reflect the revised curriculum. Results are no longer reported as levels, and each pupil will now receive their test results as a scaled score and teacher assessments based on the

standards in the interim framework. The change of assessment system in Key Stage 1 and 2 has proved a challenge and schools in Birmingham have found the gap between Birmingham and national figures has increased by a further 4% in reading, writing and maths combined.

However nationally at the end of Key Stage 2 only 53% of pupils reached the new standard and fewer pupils achieved the expected standard in reading than in other subjects.

However based on progress there has been a reduction in the number of schools below the Government's floor standards with it dropping to 17 in 2016 a reduction of 7 schools since 2015. BEP focussed on supporting Maths 2015-2016 and the effectiveness of this work can be seen in progress rates. When comparing reading and writing progress rates last year and this. Reading remains -1% behind and Writing fell by -1.2%. However maths progress has shown significant improvement and has closed the gap to national by 1.7% leaving a -0.3% deficit on national progress rates in Maths.

iii) KS4 & 5 results

Based on provisional and un validated data voluntarily submitted by participating schools KS 4 standards are as follows:

- 63% in the basics measure of A*-C in English and maths is a 5% improvement on 2015 and better performance than 2013 and 2014.
- 75% A*-C in English outperforms national (60.2%) and is an improvement on Birmingham's own 2013, 2014 and 2015 figures. Gap to national has gone from 1% behind to 15% ahead.
- 68% A*-C in maths outperforms national (61.0%) and is an improvement on Birmingham's own 2015 figure. Gap to national has gone from 5% behind to 7% ahead.
- Progress 8 estimates (based on 2015 expectations) show Birmingham schools slightly above average at 0.2.

Provisional KS 5 data suggests:

- 11.8% of Birmingham students achieving 3 A*-A grades or better at A level does not have a figure to compare against nationally, but would be in line with the national trend of decline over the last three years whilst still likely outperforming national.
- 20.9% of Birmingham students achieving grades AAB or better at A level again has no national comparison figure, however it would likely outperform national (which declined to 17.0% in 2015) the figure is also an increase over Birmingham's 2014 and 2015 performances.
- 16.1% of Birmingham students achieving grades AAB or better at A level, of which at least two are in facilitating subjects again has no national figure to compare against. Both nationally and locally the figure is declining year on year, however Birmingham was 3.6% above national last year and looks likely to remain above this year.
- 86.1% of Birmingham students achieving at least 2 A*-E grades or better at A level again has no national figure to compare against. The figure has declined from 2015 and there is a risk that the Birmingham figure will again be below the national average.

iv) Growing BEP effectiveness

After one year of full operation BEP has benefitted from particular areas of learning that have in turn brought about operational changes to increase effectiveness. These include:

- the need to recruit District Leads more deliberately who can challenge heads and lead school improvement as well as those who can act as ambassadors and networkers. In June - August 2016 BEP recruited five new District Leads, three of these are external to Birmingham with very significant school improvement experience.
- the importance of a full range of legal and commercial skills on the board supported by appropriate information sharing and decision making processes
- the need to consider commercial viability in all commitments and activities we undertake
- the need to build a more coordinated approach to raising achievement in all Birmingham schools, not just those causing concern. Building on the success of primary maths training sessions in Autumn 2015, BEP commissioners and the headteacher System Leaders' group are collaborating to develop a BEP raising achievement plan that will coordinate a city-wide approach to address key weaknesses and national priorities as most appropriate to all our schools.

d) BEP Impact and how we know

- i) Ofsted outcomes, attainment and progress data are key hard measures. Clearly averages and poor inspection outcomes are an inaccurate measure when BEP is resourced only to work in identified failing schools.
- ii) Attitudinal surveys / soft feedback has also been a feature of the plan. BCC surveys reflect broad appreciation of BEP within a context of improved communication for schools.
- iii) BEP engagement with the whole community of schools is in part built around a series of half termly meetings in Districts. These provide an open invitation for feedback.
- iv) Schools in membership and those who choose not to engage with BEP give us a strong indication of our reach and perceived relevance.

Any headteacher feedback BEP received is strongly coloured by a school's direct experience of BEP. For many this is thin. Those who have been directly involved in being supported or those who have been deployed by BEP tend to give more positive feedback.

v) BEP Space, Headstart and the Careers and Enterprise Co are all new areas of operation where the impact is currently about creating capacity and potential. The desired outcomes from this potential are long term and cannot yet be measured.

e) How BEP brokers relationships

While it was envisaged that the group of highly respected retired heads would provide the independence around commissioning decisions, in effect BEP brokering has

largely happened through open and transparent tendering with teaching schools.

Some heads have been frustrated because they have not been invited to support or work with other schools. Where BEP colleagues / district leads are aware of capacity and strength in schools they may find appropriate opportunities for deployment. In terms of what is practical and what policy expects, BEP works through teaching schools inviting them to volunteer for work as it is offered out.

f) Key issues for future working

i) Scope and expectations of BEP's work:

Since its inception one of BEP's biggest challenges has been to manage the huge range of expectations different people have of BEP. At any point in its development it is possible that partners cease to see its substantial and growing potential or adequately understand a reordering of our priorities. BEP sees itself as much more than merely being a service provider.

School Improvement is at the heart of our work. Aspects of this work are very hard to sell commercially and there is a significant gap in the thinking of many school leaders and governors about what schools expect to pay for.

In addition to School Improvement areas in which we are currently leading work include:

- Mental health, following on from HeadStart in partnership with the NHS and The Children's Society, we have secured over £250 000 of funding and considerable additional partnership support for a city wide secondary school based approach to improving adolescent mental health. The NHS Transformation Board have agreed recurrent funding of £100 000 annually.
- Careers and Enterprise Company – working with the LEP, BBC and CSR City bringing four new posts to the city's secondary schools.
- Sustaining and Growing Inclusion – working with Andy Wright and

secondary

colleagues, while also working with Special Schools to build better links between them and mainstream schools. The challenge here is to prepare the ground for collective fund holding / school responsibility for aspects of the High Needs Block around exclusions and alternative provision.

- Supporting the Early Help and Safeguarding strategy
- Wider partnerships such as Birmingham Partners and the University of Birmingham Urban Living Project

ii) Academisation and a Birmingham Charter: a city plan

BEP is committed to developing a Birmingham Charter that helps all of us mitigate against the risks of individually empowered heads or MATs taking decisions and acting in ways that harm other schools.

Beyond this universal role, as Government move towards full academisation, BEP is seeking to hold a central place in forming a collaborative to provide a suite of services with School Improvement at its heart, that both fulfil BEP's original vision to unite Birmingham schools and that brings capacity to a new generation of MATs who will not enjoy the benefits of early adopters.

These MATs would be a fulfilment of the vision for schools engaging strongly with a civic agenda, seeing themselves as community and city assets.

The above vision is helped by Sir David Carter (National Schools Commissioner) choosing to monitor BEP in the same way as he monitors the big nine national academy chains making BEP accountable for monitoring and standards in maintained schools.

iii) Future landscape : BCC expectations of BEP

In an environment of commissioning and partnership there is much of value that BEP does that brings immediate and potential benefit for the city. Currently BEP has no financial security beyond the current academic year although the future burden on teaching schools may cause them to choose to buy a considerable portion of BEP's capacity.