

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET
27 January 2026

2025 Provisional Attainment Outcomes Report of Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
 - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on attainment including attainment gaps at its meeting on 21 November 2025.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, , and Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, and Kim Wilson, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings – Standards, Effectiveness, and

Performance (ADSS), for attending to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

SUMMARY

5. The Assistant Director presented provisional, unvalidated attainment data, explaining that, whilst Oxfordshire's attainment score of 46.2 was marginally above the national average (45.9), progress scores could not be measured owing to pandemic-related exam cancellations meaning there were no baseline data to measure against. Assessments included in the report were Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) taken by children at the end of Reception Class, phonics assessment at end of year 1, Key Stage 2 assessments in Reading, Writing and Maths taken by children at the end of primary school and GCSE exams taken by children at the end of Year 11.
6. The Assistant Director noted that white British children in Oxfordshire achieved at or above national levels across key metrics; however, disadvantaged children, particularly disadvantaged white British children, continued to lag behind, widening the attainment gap. The Assistant Director stressed that schools account for only around 20% of children's outcomes, with wider factors such as family health and deprivation having significant effects.
7. Members engaged in a very wide-ranging discussion and topics explored including support for schools; mentoring; financial provision; literacy and child health; creativity and the arts; multi-agency working; free school meals; COVID-19; attendance and welfare; relationships with parents; safeguarding; member engagement with local schools.
8. The Committee makes three recommendations: two are about partnership and the third is about how the education and inclusion strategy should be developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. One issue that the Committee explored was the importance of local members being involved in schools within their divisions. Whilst the majority of schools are now academies and are not under local authority control, the Council still has influence. Members and officers recounted the value that most individual schools, and academy chains, set on local members being interested in and engaged with schools. One particular role that members had found of great value over the years was serving on governing boards.
10. Some members reflected on the challenges of building relationships with local schools and said that they would welcome practical tips or brokered introductions from both experienced councillors as well as officers.

11. Members of the Committee were aware of visits to schools within their divisions by both senior officers and by Cabinet members. Partly in order to strengthen their own relationships with the schools, and partly out of courtesy, members were keen that the local member should be notified in advance of the visit. This could potentially enable them to attend alongside the officer or Cabinet member but it would also ensure that they had an awareness of what was happening at a particular school within their division.
12. The Cabinet member for Children and Young People was keen to emphasise that was already his approach, for which the Committee was grateful, but the Committee was of the view that his personal approach should be formalised.

Recommendation 1: That the Council should adapt its protocol so that local members are notified when Cabinet members and senior officers visit schools within their division.

13. The Committee noted that there were several important initiatives in Oxfordshire that were intended to support the vision of working collaboratively and strategically to improve outcomes for children, particularly for those children who are disadvantaged and for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Government's SEND White Paper had been delayed and so there was an absence of clarity about precisely how and what systemic changes were to be brought in.
14. The Committee strongly endorsed the principle of partnership working and collaboration in this sphere. The Committee notes that, whilst Oxfordshire performs above the national average in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and at Key Stage 4 (GCSEs), with 71% and 66% of pupils meeting expected standards, Year 1 Phonics and Key Stage 2 results are slightly below national averages. The Committee noted with regret that, whilst some small improvements can be observed, disadvantaged pupils in Oxfordshire continue to underperform compared to national averages at all stages.
15. There are examples of excellent practice and there are examples of schools that would benefit from support. Working together and sharing examples of best practice, as well as mentoring, can only be beneficial and the Committee is keen to support that.
16. The Committee discussed best practice in other councils as well as locally, with members sharing examples of schools excelling in creating happy, welcoming, safe environments which were seen as crucial for pupil attainment. Members were keen for the Council to play a key role in working with schools, through partnership with academy trusts and via the Oxfordshire Education and Inclusion Partnership, to celebrate success and to share best practice – particularly with regard to attainment of disadvantaged pupils –for the benefit of all children in the county.

Recommendation 2: That the Council should celebrate successes and share best practice across the family of schools in the area.

17. The Government's recent Curriculum and Assessment Review noted that the national curriculum had not been reviewed for a decades and that it was important that "it is now refreshed so that it remains cutting edge and fit for purpose to equip young people for our rapidly changing world."¹ The opportunity for a new curriculum was welcomed by members of the Committee who were keen to see the curriculum modernised and hoped that there would be a renewed focus on the arts.
18. Creativity and the arts were recognised by members as vital for child development and the Committee began to explore how multi-agency collaboration might reflect the growing emphasis on these areas. The Committee agreed that there would need to be space for schools to adapt to curriculum changes but, also, that safeguarding, education, and virtual school teams were essential.
19. The Oxfordshire Education and Inclusion Partnership, chaired by the Director of Children's Services and with representation from across the sector, was developing its Education and Inclusion strategy. The Committee was keen that, in doing so, it should have particular regard to the importance of child safeguarding, child protection, and also the curriculum review. The importance of these aspects might seem self-evident but the Committee was of the view that, such was their importance, they should be recorded formally as a recommendation.

Recommendation 3: That the Council, in developing the Oxfordshire Education and Inclusion Strategy, should ensure that sufficient attention is given to child safeguarding and protection as well as the curriculum review.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

20. The Committee anticipates considering the validated attainment data and hopes that an all-member briefing will also be arranged on this topic.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

21. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
22. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report - Building a world-class curriculum for all.pdf , pg 7

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Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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