

Division(s): All

CABINET- 17 JULY 2012

EDUCATION STRATEGY – PROGRESS REPORT

Report by the Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. On 28 February 2012, Children's Services Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Education Strategy: A Strategy for Change, Improving Educational Outcomes in Oxfordshire. The purpose of this report is to present the Strategy and provide a progress report on the key strands. Since the Scrutiny meeting in February, there have been a number of discussions with partners about the strategy, including Headteachers and Governors.

Background

2. The national education landscape is undergoing a period of rapid and far reaching change involving shifting responsibilities, new and reduced funding arrangements, revised expectations, new accountabilities and changing relationships. A key driver for change is the 2011 Education Act, which includes a determination to give school leaders more power and control to drive up improvement, not only in their own schools, but across the whole education system.
3. In a climate of economic uncertainty and competing pressures on resources, it is important to ensure that Oxfordshire is a thriving environment in which to live and work. The education system has a key role to play by making sure that children and young people achieve their potential; are able to make a major positive contribution to their communities and to the local economy; and that they develop the skills and personal resources to compete in an increasingly global marketplace.
4. The drive to encourage Free Schools and to convert schools to Academy status instead of maintained Local Authority status is strongly articulated nationally, and endorsed locally through the February 2012 Cabinet report. Under current arrangements for Academies, the responsibility for school standards and progress sits with school leaders and governing bodies.
5. For maintained schools, the Headteacher and Governors are currently responsible for school standards and progress and, in the case of schools causing concern where there is a failure to meet expected standards or where pupils do not make sufficient progress, the Local Authority continues to hold a statutory responsibility and has statutory powers to intervene and to support and challenge the school to make improvements.

6. In the case of maintained schools that are judged to be inadequate or where pupils perform below the floor standards, the Secretary of State expects the Local Authority to ensure that there is a plan in place to improve those schools and, where that cannot be delivered, to recommend structural solutions, including federation, Interim Executive Boards and finding sponsors to move the school to Academy status.
7. In this context, the Local Authority retains an important role in influencing improvement and, even if all schools convert to become Academies, under current legislation it still retains a strategic and statutory role; the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) retain a responsibility to champion good outcomes for Oxfordshire's children.
8. Oxfordshire has consistently lagged behind the performance of statistical neighbours, usually in the bottom quartile and frequently last on a number of measures. Performance is more often in line with national averages rather than being well above as is expected, given the overall affluence of the county. Although there are areas of significant deprivation within the county, other areas of the country perform much better in spite of high levels of deprivation.
9. There have been improvements in inspection outcomes and in the performance of some schools and, in particular, there are some green shoots in relation to early years education. However, the overall picture is one of a slow pace of improvement, inconsistency between similar schools, across Districts, subject areas and for vulnerable groups. This has been a source of concern for many years.
10. Oxfordshire is committed to raising achievement for all children and young people and closing the gap between those facing disadvantage and their peers. It remains imperative to address the needs of children and families that may be facing disadvantage related to their gender, ethnicity, disability and social deprivation.

Strategic Approach

11. Through talking with stakeholders, it is clear that Oxfordshire needs to be ambitious for its children and young people. The vision is for Oxfordshire to be a dynamic and forward looking place for education and learning, providing the best quality experiences for children and young people to grow up, learn, develop and achieve. This means that every single child and young person in Oxfordshire will make good progress in their learning and achieve their potential. Children and young people need to have the opportunity to thrive in sustainably good or outstanding schools and settings throughout their education, wherever they live across the county.
12. There are three key strands to the Education Strategy: Outstanding Leadership and Aspiration Networks, Targeted Campaigns and System Redesign for Education.

13. **Outstanding Leadership/Aspiration Networks** has two elements. The first is about a concentrated approach to securing the outstanding leadership and governance that the school system needs, together with an excellent workforce. The second is the Aspiration Networks that have been established with groups of schools with a focus on sharing practice and raising standards. Each network has some key objectives to deliver.
14. **Targeted Campaigns** are a series of campaigns that engage all schools, settings and partners. The first campaign is reading. There are a number of key outcomes expected from this strand; the main objective is substantially improving reading standards as measured at Level 2b+ in Key Stage 1 tests across the county through targeting 80 schools.
15. **System Redesign for Education** focuses on two areas of work. First, is leading the work around locally shaping the new education landscape and changing status of schools in order to ensure a sustained focus on improvement and better outcomes for children and young people. The second is responding to the changing education system by moving towards commissioning services for outcomes and considering new and sustainable models for service delivery.
16. Underpinning these three strands is the core theme of **early intervention and a good start in life**. Early intervention, ensuring school readiness and supporting the most vulnerable learners is a key part of this strategy. Part of this work will be to embed the new Early Intervention Service and to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across the county. Over time this will involve consideration of the role of Children's Centres to ensure that services continue to develop in response to local need and that performance is measure against key outcomes.
17. Governance arrangements are being put in place to monitor the strategy. Underpinning the activity below will be a communication strategy.
 - An **Education Transform Board** will monitor the key strands, data related to school and early intervention and take an overview of quality assurance of services supporting school improvement.
 - A **Leaders on Initiatives and Partnership Group** will consist of chairs of partnership groups of schools, headteachers who are leading outstanding schools or those leading innovative practice that is improving outcomes for children and young people. The Group will become a driving force for change, influencing key developments in the area of education and driving forward the education strategy for the future.
 - An **Advisory Board** chaired by the Leader of the County Council has also been established. Its membership comprises of local influential members of the education community and its remit is to act as a think-tank focusing on improving outcomes for Oxfordshire learners.
18. A number of performance measures will be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Strategy throughout its lifetime, as it starts to deliver

improved educational outcomes. Each of the three key strands will have specific deliverables and additional measures to assess the strand's success will be agreed through the Governance structure.

Financial and Staff implications

19. The Strategy for Change – Improved Education Outcomes in Oxfordshire has resources allocated to it in the region of £2 million. Resources have been allocated from earmarked resources and Schools Forum have agreed to £585,000 to be allocated to the Reading Campaign from balances from the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Legal Implications

20. There are a number of national policy changes and initiatives affecting the Children, Education & Families Directorate, including the Academies Act 2010 and the Education Act 2011.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

21. These proposals will enhance support and raise awareness of the needs of underachieving groups in schools. If services have to be delivered in different ways in the future because of changes to the education system then Service and Community Impact Assessments will be undertaken.

Risk Implications

22. A risk is that the strands of work are not sustainable. It will be critical to engage schools in the development and implementation of the strategy as this will ensure its sustainability. Whole system change in an emerging educational landscape takes time and the strategy needs to develop milestones to demonstrate progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to agree the Strategy for Change – Improving Educational Outcomes in Oxfordshire.**

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Background Papers:

Annex 1 - Strategy for Change – Improving Education Outcomes in Oxfordshire

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