Education and Young People’s Services

Strategy for School Improvement

Inspiring Excellence

February 2016
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Preface

I am pleased to introduce our revised School Improvement Strategy. The strategy sets out clearly the school improvement responsibilities of the Local Authority and schools and how we work together to secure the best educational outcomes for children and young people. We hope that the strategy will be helpful to a range of partners including Headteachers and Executive Headteachers, Governing Bodies, sponsor organisations and Diocesan Directors.

The Kent Strategy for School Improvement focuses on the actions needed to reach the aspirations and achieve the targets for improvement set out in the county council’s ‘Vision and Priorities for Improvement 2016-2019’.

A range of services support school improvement, all with the aim that children and young people receive the highest quality education and achieve well. These services provide support in the following areas: special educational needs (SEN); attendance and inclusion; educational psychology, area education officer functions including place planning; early years and childcare; 14-19 skills and employability; training and professional development; governor support; schools finance; human resources; property services. The work of these services and other Local Authority officers makes a significant contribution to supporting and challenging schools to improve.

This strategy focuses mainly on the way in which the School Improvement Service works with schools. This service offers a range of support to all schools and intensive support designed to bring about rapid improvement in the schools where it is most needed.

The concept of the ‘Kent family of schools’ where school leaders work together for the benefit of all is highly valued. The Local Authority works in partnership with the Kent Association of Headteachers (KAH) and schools in order to develop and strengthen networks and collaborations which provide school to school support.

The School Improvement Strategy is updated annually in order to focus on current issues for schools and the Local Authority. As the County Council is constantly seeking to improve its partnership with schools we welcome views about how this strategy could be strengthened and how we can improve the ways we work together in the future.

KCC is deeply committed to high quality education and improving the life chances of every child and young person in the County. To underpin this commitment the Council is continuing to fund a strong School Improvement Service to support and drive improvements in pupil achievement, to close the education attainment gaps and to increase the number of good and outstanding schools across Kent.

Gillian Cawley
Director, Education Quality and Standards
1 Introduction

Education and Young People’s Services ‘Vision and Priorities for Improvement’ sets out Kent’s vision, ambition and challenges for the future across the range of services for children and young people and also the ambitious outcomes they should achieve. These are set out below:

Our Vision

“Our strategic priorities for Education and Young People’s Services are to ensure all children get the best start in the early years and all pupils can go to a good school and achieve their full potential; to shape education and skills provision around the needs of the Kent economy and ensure all young people move on to positive destinations, training and employment; and to improve services and outcomes for the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Kent.’ (Vision and Priorities for Improvement - 2015-2018)

Our Ambition

‘Central to our ambition is the desire to create the conditions in which pupils experience the best learning and teaching, and where pupils’ social, moral and intellectual development and confidence can flourish. We want every child in Kent to achieve well above expectations and not to be held back by their social background. We want every young person to benefit from a broad range of pathways to further learning and employment, for their own achievement and for the success of the Kent economy. We want to ensure that vulnerable children and families have their needs met early so that they do not experience the level of challenge and difficulty in their lives that requires statutory interventions. They should have the same opportunities as all other children and families to flourish, to stay safe and well and succeed in the education system.’ (Vision and Priorities for Improvement - 2015-2018)

The Challenges for the Future

‘The UK has to achieve a more educated and skilled workforce and cannot afford to lose the potential of so many young people who, if they are not educated and skilled well enough, will lead less productive and satisfying lives. The economic and social cost of educational failure is immense and too much provision that is less than good damages the life chances of children and young people. In this mix the role of the Local Authority is changing to be more ambitious, focused and strategic in bringing about educational transformation for Kent by being a strong and influential partner and commissioner with schools and other stakeholders and providers.’ (Vision and Priorities for Improvement - 2016-2019).

The strategic plans and targets for Education and Young People’s Services ‘Vision and Priorities for Improvement’ are set out in detail in the following key documents:

- The Early Years and Childcare Strategy
- The School Improvement Strategy
- The SEND Strategy
- The Education Commissioning Plan
The 14-24 Learning, Skills and Employment Strategy  
The Early Help Strategy and Three Year Plan  
The NEETs Strategy  
The Vulnerable Learners Strategy  
The Youth Justice Plan

This document ‘The School Improvement Strategy: Inspiring Excellence’ sets out the way in which the Local Authority works with all schools to achieve improvements in the quality of education and the achievement of all learners.

**Key School Improvement Priorities for Kent**

The Vision and Priorities for Improvement 2016-2019 document sets out clearly what needs to improve and the targets for improvement in the next few years. The key priorities identified for school improvement are to:

- raise attainment, close achievement gaps, reduce exclusion, have more good and outstanding early years settings and schools, and ensure all young people are engaged in learning or training until age 18 with good outcomes that lead to employment
- continue to improve educational performance in line with agreed targets supporting and challenging lower performing early years and childcare settings, schools and other providers to improve provision quickly so that it becomes at least good
- increase the focus on and support for vulnerable pupils, so that achievement gaps close for children entitled to free school meals, those in care and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- work with schools to ensure every child has fair access to all schools and other provision, and are included and supported to participate in education which is the most appropriate for their needs
- promote and support smooth and effective transition for every child and young person from any one educational stage and provision to another
- improve opportunities and pathways for all 14-19 year olds to participate and succeed so that they can access training, employment with training or higher levels of learning to age 24
- champion 21st century learning so that schools and other settings become more innovative in delivering a curriculum that promotes high achievement and develops students’ skills and knowledge for the future

It also makes clear the priority to ensure the success of all schools by supporting:

- excellent school leaders to drive improvement as system leaders and improve outcomes for children and young people across all schools through developing stronger and more purposeful collaborations and partnerships between groups of schools, and with the Kent Association of Headteachers, and its District forums and Area Boards.
2 The School Improvement Context

School performance in Kent is improving but is not yet ‘good or outstanding for all’.

The national context and policy direction is for schools to be increasingly autonomous, responsible for their own improvement and free to make the decisions that they believe will enable them to secure the best outcomes for children and young people. The Local Authority welcomes this autonomy and works with schools in partnership, facilitating and brokering high quality services that support school improvement and challenging and supporting schools to achieve high standards.

With autonomy comes strong school accountability for performance, through published results and the Ofsted inspection framework. This accountability is also to the local community, parents and the wider group of stakeholders who rely on schools to be successful. It is part of Kent’s school improvement strategy to support schools to demonstrate progress over time and evaluate the impact of improvement by using and analysing a range of effective quantitative and qualitative data.

The main strategic and statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority are to:

- support and challenge schools to improve, to ensure high standards of achievement and ensure that schools are judged at least good if not outstanding
- intervene more formally where under-performance makes it necessary to do so
- make good provision for excluded pupils and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and to ensure they make good progress
- ensure there are sufficient good quality school places for every child
- ensure fair access to appropriate education for every child

A fundamental part of the school improvement strategy is to promote school to school support through collaboration, partnerships, federations and academy trusts, alongside more bespoke links between individual schools where there is a need for rapid improvement.

We rely on and support the deployment of highly effective Headteachers, who as Kent Leaders of Education (KLEs) or National Leaders of Education (NLEs) work with other schools to aid their improvement and build leadership capacity.

These highly effective Headteachers and Principals, as system leaders, build greater resilience into the system as a whole, through the broader exchange of knowledge, skills, expertise and capacity, with the strongest schools supporting others while benefitting themselves from collaboration with other schools.

School to school support and improvement through collaborations and partnerships in Kent has developed to include more than 500 schools working in 60 collaborative hubs, with strong partnership agreements focused on raising standards and improving the quality of education.
3 Bringing about Improvement

In order to bring about the improvements needed as rapidly as possible the local authority uses the following strategies;

- providing high quality performance data at school, district and county levels to sharply focus improvement and identify and learn from trends particularly where there is rapid improvement
- providing advice, support and challenge to schools to improve leadership capacity, teaching and learning and effective action to improve pupil progress and achievement
- focusing on improvement and innovation in teaching and learning, to ensure that teaching improves rapidly to become at least good
- identifying the best early years providers, schools, teachers and school leaders and using them across the system to develop and disseminate best practice
- Promoting and supporting the use of Kent Leaders of Education, National and Local leaders of Education, and deploying them well to support improvement in other schools, through partnership with KAH and the Teaching School Alliances
- promoting rapid gains in performance across the school system through the leadership and influence of the best performing schools working in collaboration with others
- supporting governors to carry out their role effectively by becoming better informed about best practice; using data to plan for school improvement; keeping the performance of their schools under review; and taking prompt action where necessary.
- promoting more effective partnerships, working with academy sponsors, academy trusts, employers, health commissioners and providers and other key stakeholders, to build capacity for system-wide improvements
- strengthening district based working so that there is more coordinated and integrated work between schools, early years settings, KCC education and Early Help services, health, social care and other partners
- becoming a stronger commissioner of services, especially in relation to support for vulnerable children and young people and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities; including the expansion of provision in the early years, schools, the 14-19 sector, so that demand is met with good and cost effective provision
- ensuring that education, Early Help, Early Years education and childcare, health, Social Care and the voluntary sector work closely with parents and carers in a well-co-ordinated way to bring about improvements in the quality of provision for vulnerable children and young people from early childhood to early adulthood
• developing ways to give children and young people a greater say in the services that affect them and making better use of their views in the design and implementation of new and better ways of working

4 The Strategy at Work

The School Improvement Strategy is one of the key ways in which the Local Authority’s statutory duties are discharged. It puts into action Kent County Council’s statutory responsibility for supporting, challenging and intervening in schools, as set out in a range of legislation including the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Academies Act 2010 and the Education Act 2011 which amended the 2006 Act.

As part of the School Improvement Strategy and as the champion of children, young people and families, the Local Authority gives priority to the needs of vulnerable groups. The focus with vulnerable children and young people is on ensuring that the quality of provision is at least good and on closing the achievement gap.

The building blocks for the strategy for school improvement are:

• what schools are expected to do to manage their own improvement
• the benefit that schools derive from working collaboratively to bring about improvement
• the collective responsibility for improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area

The Local Authority retains the capacity to intervene in schools which are underperforming, under the terms of section 60 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Education Act 2011. Decisive action is taken where schools have a record of failing to achieve floor standards or where there are serious concerns which put achievement, safety and the general well-being of children and young people at risk.

However, the strategy focuses primarily on building the climate, culture and capacity of continuous self-improvement mainly through effective development and dissemination of best practice between schools. There are already many examples of this type of work having a significant impact on improvement in quality and standards. In order to strengthen this approach priority is given supporting schools to collaborate to bring about improvement through school-to-school support.

‘Vision and Priorities for Improvement 2016-2019’ in Kent is rightly ambitious to improve aspects of educational performance which fall short of expectations and are not improving at a sufficiently rapid rate. Much of the work of the School Improvement Service is targeted to the areas of greatest need based on a clear assessment of strengths and weaknesses which includes information from the school’s own self-evaluation. An agreed annual programme of support and challenge is put in place designed to raise standards and bring about improvements in quality and pupil outcomes.

It is recognised that different schools need different kinds of support at different times. The strategy is designed to provide bespoke packages for schools including: School Improvement Advisers; other Local Authority services; brokered consultancy; and access to a range of training programmes. The focus of this work includes support for good and outstanding schools as part of their school improvement programme.
A key part of the strategy is the brokering of effective partnerships and collaborations between schools where, for example a strong school might be supporting and providing capacity for a less well performing school to improve.

The Local Authority has also worked with Headteachers to establish a more systematic school to school support model, which complements the authority’s school improvement function. The Kent Association of Headteachers Area Boards have the responsibility for taking this work forward with the systematic development of school to school support in each local area and the allocation of funds to support improvements through collaboration.

In addition to the collaborations, the Kent Association of Headteachers, the Teaching Schools Alliances, Academy Trusts and other partner organisations such as the National College and the South East Leadership Trust form a secure partnership network for school improvement across Kent.

5 Allocation of Support

The Local Authority knows its schools well, analyses all performance data and inspection outcomes and uses the feedback and monitoring arrangements carried out by School Improvement Advisers to ensure schools that need to improve most receive the most support.

The Local Authority is also aware of feedback on school performance resulting from: parent views or complaints; preferences for school places; the views of governors and the wider community; information arising from exclusions and SEND data; and feedback from young people. The school Improvement Service incorporates this feedback into discussions with schools about their improvement needs.

Each school has an allocated linked School Improvement Adviser who meets with them regularly. The School Improvement Service monitors the performance of schools and provides a package of support to all maintained schools and academies. The Headteacher and the School Improvement Adviser will plan the focus of the support for the school, encompassing a focus on pupil achievement, teaching and learning and leadership and management.

Schools causing concern receive the highest level of monitoring and support but the intensity of this support reduces as performance of a school improves.

Most schools identify and address strengths and priorities for improvement through their self-evaluation and these are discussed at the regular meeting with the School Improvement Adviser. If a serious weakness (or serious weaknesses) is identified then the Local Authority will consider how best to support the school, where necessary using statutory powers of intervention. These include the use of formal warning notices and in very rare circumstances the removal of delegated powers from the governing body. In all cases schools are supported to remain active partners in their own improvement.

As well as linked Advisers working with individual schools, the Senior Improvement Advisers monitor progress across schools in their areas, and where insufficient progress is made a more general review or joint review meeting is held with a school to challenge performance and agree a support programme for improvement.
These review meetings are organised with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors and focus on performance data and other information about the effectiveness of practice and provision in the school. The Senior Adviser for the relevant phase checks that the action plan for improvement is fit for purpose, is being implemented effectively and is securing progress against the areas of concern.

**Schools that Require Additional Support**

The Local Authority works closely with schools causing concern and requiring improvement, where there is a need for increased capacity and where the agreed processes of review, evaluation, improvement planning, and external support and challenge are a necessary accompaniment to what the schools can do for themselves. This is especially the case where there is a need to accelerate the rate of improvement to ensure pupils make sufficiently good progress.

There is also a duty to intervene more formally when schools are not providing a good enough quality of education, where there is other cause for concern, or when Ofsted judges a school to be inadequate. This duty is carried out in a transparent way and all concerns are discussed with governors and senior leaders before any formal action is taken.

For schools judged by Ofsted or the Local Authority to require improvement or to be in a category of concern, there are detailed action plans put in place by school improvement professionals. These include intensive support and six weekly progress reviews carried out by an action group to monitor the rate of improvement. These action groups include senior leaders, governors, School Improvement Advisers and other specialist staff from the Local Authority. The purpose is to make sure that the school is receiving the most appropriate support and its resources are focused on clear targets and actions for improvement. The process is aligned to the regular monitoring of these schools by HMI.

**Academies and Free Schools**

Working with all schools is a fundamental part of the Local Authority’s commitment to the Kent family of schools. There are good relationships with all maintained schools and, as part of the improvement strategy, academies are offered three visits from a School Improvement Adviser as part of the ‘Keep in Touch’ programme.

These are intended to be helpful to academies and free schools, to facilitate their engagement with local authority services and agreed local protocols, and to offer support for improvement where it is needed.

Where the Local Authority has concerns about the performance of an academy or free school, and where there has been limited engagement to support improvement, the Corporate Director for Education and Young People’s Services may write a formal letter of concern to the appropriate academy school or trust detailing the level of concern and the reasons for it, and the continued level of support offered by KCC. When concerns persist a formal letter is written to the Regional Schools Commissioner advising the RSC of the Local Authority’s concerns and the need for action to bring about improvement.
6 Local Authority Monitoring and Evaluation Cycle

The implementation of the Local Authority school improvement cycle ensures that there is a clear focus on the performance of schools, including progress and outcomes for all pupils, the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of senior leadership and governance.

The review of schools’ needs for improvement includes the Ofsted judgements for overall effectiveness, the school’s published results and the regular visits to schools by Improvement Advisers and Senior Improvement Advisers. These reviews are updated several times during the school year to monitor progress.

Every school has an attached Adviser who works with the school to provide challenge and support. They carry out a regular cycle of monitoring and evaluation, joint lesson observations, reviews of pupil progress data and reviews of the impact of leadership and management. The frequency of the visits depends on the capacity of the school and the effectiveness and accuracy of its own monitoring programme and self-evaluation. Outcomes of these visits are regularly in Notes of Visit reported to governors.

The role of the School Improvement Adviser is to:

- support, review and validate school self-evaluation
- support the school to analyse and interpret data to inform school improvement
- challenge and support schools to identify and take action on key areas for improvement
- agree improvement priorities
- support school leaders in setting robust and aspirational targets
- support school leadership in planning and improvement
- broker support where required
- inform governors of progress against school improvement priorities through ‘Notes of Visit’
- give advice to governors on Headteacher appraisal for requires improvement and category schools and others where commissioned to do so
- support schools to prepare for inspection and during the Ofsted inspection process, including a meeting with the lead inspector and attending feedback
- carry out visits in line with the school improvement strategy

Notes of Visit are to:

- summarise the key points of the visit including clear judgements about the school and feedback on progress
- provide information for governors
- evaluate progress against key areas for improvement
- validate the schools own self-evaluation
- record actions taken to improve and evaluate a school's performance
- make recommendations and agree actions for the school to secure further improvement and good performance
7 The School Improvement Service Level Agreement 2015

The Local Authority will continue to fund core improvement support for all schools in Kent as part of the statutory responsibility to ensure good educational outcomes for all children and young people.

Every school in Kent continues to be offered support through links with a Senior Improvement Adviser or Improvement Adviser (Primary) and will receive a number of visits which are non-chargeable.

The number of visits is flexible but is determined by the improvement needs of schools based on Ofsted outcomes and analysis of school performance data. The Local Authority is committed to working with all schools and therefore the existing three ‘keeping in touch’ visits for academies and free schools remain for the coming school year.

Good and outstanding maintained schools receive up to three visits from the School Improvement Team depending on their needs. Maintained schools that require improvement receive up to twelve visits and those in a category up to twenty visits. Visits include advice and support for school monitoring of teaching and learning, reviews of school data and pupil progress, supporting and reviewing school self-evaluation, support for Ofsted preparation and the brokering of support for school improvement priorities.

Support is also provided to governing bodies on Headteacher recruitment in all maintained schools and Headteacher appraisal for those maintained schools which require improvement or are in a category of concern.

In addition, maintained schools continue to receive a number of central services which are non-chargeable. Any support or visits which are over and above the non-chargeable offer are paid for by schools either through purchasing the service level agreement or on a pay as you go basis. The details of these services are set out in ‘The School Improvement Service Level Agreement from September 2015’ available from EduKent.