

Excellence for All 2021 – 2023

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Foreword

East Sussex is a County which aspires to be a great place to live and work. It is also a County where education is a key priority. We are ambitious to achieve the best for our children and young people, whatever their background.

The first Excellence for All strategy was published in 2013 and each iteration has a two-year life span. In 2020, the global pandemic precipitated an unprecedented change in the education landscape, and we shall continue to uncover the implications of that change for many years to come.

In the spirit of using this monumental shift for the benefit of children and young people, rather than looking at it as an insurmountable challenge, this strategy draws on the innovation and creativity of the work that was done during lockdown on remote learning, participation and inclusion and looks to embed these into our future ways of working. Our partnership infrastructure remains the key local mechanism for delivering the shared ambitions set out in this strategy. We shall continue to work collaboratively in order to build capacity for improvement, drive innovation and ensure the very best education for our children and young people.

Our approach to developing our strategic ambitions was to run multiple consultation and engagement sessions with our partners and ask them the following core questions:

- What do you think we already do well collectively, in East Sussex, for children and young people?
- Are there parts of our collective system that could work better together? How?
- What opportunities does a post-COVID 19 world present?
- What are your priorities for children and young people's education in East Sussex over the next 2 years?
- What would success look like?

The answers to these questions were drawn together to form the bedrock of this strategy. This collaborative process also highlighted the need to work on a long-term vision and strategy for the education system in East Sussex and this will be the focus of the next phase in our strategic planning.

We look forward to working with all our partners over the next two years to deliver the ambitions set out in this strategy. We have distilled these down into three key areas that will form the focus of our work together. These ambitions are underpinned by a commitment to wellbeing in education and a belief that strong, collaborative leadership is the key to our success. We invite you all to lead this strategy with us so that, together, we can create an excellent education for all our children and young people.

Local Context

East Sussex is a diverse county with urban, rural, and coastal areas with different characteristics. The education sector is made up of a range of providers.

Key facts about the education sector are:

- 486 early years' providers, made up of 181 nurseries/pre-schools, 225 childminders, 24 standalone holiday playschemes/out of school clubs, 44 schools with nurseries (maintained/academies), 12 independent school nurseries
- 187 schools: 148 primary phase schools, 3 all-through schools, 23 secondary schools, 11 special schools and 2 alternative provisions
- one further education college, one sixth form college and one land-based college
- 34% of schools are currently in academy trusts - 24% primary, 100% all through schools, 61% secondary, 91% special schools, 100% alternative provision
- 22% of primary schools are in federations. There are no secondary or special schools in federations
- 67,374 number of learners on roll across primary, secondary and special schools
- 15.6% of pupils are BAME
- 20.9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 15.3% of pupils have SEN
- 1739 children in need, 487 children with a child protection plan and 616 looked after children aged 0 – 17 years across the county.

East Sussex is determined to ensure that all children and young people achieve the very best they can. Excellence for All is a collective ambition from all those who lead, staff and support our settings, schools and colleges.

Where are we now?

Since March 2020, the UK has experienced three national lockdowns which saw schools, settings and colleges closed to most children and young people. Whilst advancements in science and public health systems are being made at a ground-breaking pace, there is no guarantee that children and young people will not experience further disruption to learning in schools and settings, for some time to come.

It is critical that the education system in East Sussex embraces the learning gained during the pandemic and uses it to improve the educational experience we offer to all young people. Our school-led improvement system will allow us to address the challenges ahead and share best practice for tackling the complex issues which may arise from lockdown.

Our schools and settings underwent radical transformation at all levels to deal with the challenges and opportunities posed by remote learning. We have seen teachers successfully lift their curriculum out of the classroom and map it onto digital platforms for young people to access at home. We have seen Senior Leaders and Governing Boards shift their focus to the importance of mental health and wellbeing and build it further into their strategic visions for their organisations. We have seen many young people and their families take a leadership role in their own learning and engage with their school more meaningfully and regularly than ever before.

Schools and settings in East Sussex played an essential role in the local response to the pandemic. Their provision for the children of key workers and for the most vulnerable young people strengthened their role as cornerstones of the community.

The Primary and Secondary Boards played an important role through the last year in supporting schools. Local partnerships have enabled schools to share practice and solve problems whilst the Boards have provided strategic direction and additional resource to address emerging priorities.

Despite our sharper focus on the most disadvantaged in our previous strategy, lockdown proved/demonstrated that the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners was still too great and that the aspirations, resources and structures that we had in place to ensure that the most disadvantaged achieve consistently high outcomes are not yet sufficient.

What do we mean by Leadership?

Leadership is about developing the skills and confidence across organisations and partnerships, through creating an environment in which individuals feels both supported and stretched, to enable them to perform and learn at their best.

Partners across East Sussex share the strategic aim to provide excellent leadership for all learners. Leaders are committed to transforming the educational experience of all young people to ensure that they achieve consistently high outcomes and progress positively to the next stage of their learning.

The Primary and Secondary Boards share a collective responsibility to improve outcomes for all young people in East Sussex. Leaders in schools, settings and colleges will be supported in their aim to achieve outstanding leadership, through the strategic direction of the boards.

The Boards are at the heart of the school-led improvement system and serve all the schools in East Sussex, whether they are local authority schools, stand-alone academies, or members of a multi-academy trust.

System leadership, through collaboration, provides opportunities for practitioners to share best practice across schools and settings, whilst creating opportunities for a wider array of career development opportunities.

Our strategic ambition is for East Sussex to be a place where we grow the very best leaders, providing opportunities to progress along dynamic leadership pathways, and attracting leaders from outside of the county to come and work in our schools, colleges and settings.

Strong leaders will also be needed to address the challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. These leaders will reject the rhetoric of deficit and 'lost' learning and will instead look at ways to deliver a quality educational experience which allows young people to progress and to thrive.

Shared Ambitions

These new shared ambitions build on the successes and improvements that schools, settings, and our partners have achieved over the past two years. They were developed through a series of collaborative engagement sessions with partners and stakeholders.

They also acknowledge and confront the gaps in our work which urgently need to be addressed for the education system in East Sussex to truly meet the needs of all learners, across all phases.

In East Sussex, we will work together to:

- **Support every setting and partnership to strengthen leadership at all levels, enabling leaders who promote excellence for all children and young people.**

We will know we have achieved this when:

- every school, setting, college and post-16 provider in East Sussex are at least 'good' as judged by Ofsted
- every school, setting, college and post-16 provider has a strong SEND offer which is enhanced by support and collaboration with partners
- Safeguarding policies and practice are robust, and children are educated and informed about risks to their health and well-being
- the impact of leadership development opportunities across East Sussex can be seen in strong leadership appointments and better performance at all key stages

- governors make successful appointments to leadership roles which have a positive impact on all key outcome measures
- **Improve literacy and oracy, across all phases, to build on the gains that have been made in the county over recent years and address areas of historically lower achievement.**

We will know we have achieved this when:

- attainment and progress outcomes for English, reading and writing at all key stages are in the top quartiles, particularly for the most disadvantaged young people including SEND
- practitioners and leaders in Early Years to Key Stage 1 feel confident that challenges in speech and language and school readiness, exacerbated by lockdowns, are being addressed through training and support and that the impact on the children is evident in their progress
- reading is a priority in all schools across East Sussex, demonstrated through a well sequenced reading curriculum, with a focus on a love of reading and on the good teaching of reading
- **Take the innovations in approaches to learning and participation, developed during the pandemic, into our post lockdown working to support the inclusion and wellbeing of children and young people.**

We will know we have achieved this when:

- there is a consistently high take up of funded places for early years children
- we see an increase in those who secure and progress through their chosen post-16 career pathway; and local post-16 provision reflects the sector skills priorities of East Sussex
- we see an increase in Gatsby Benchmarks evidencing excellence in careers provision across our schools and colleges
- attendance figures exceed national levels on all measures
- there is a significant decrease in permanent and fixed term exclusions across all East Sussex schools
- Mental Health Support Teams are embedded in targeted schools and colleges and offer high quality support for these communities

Wellbeing in Education

The local authority will fulfil its role as champion for children and young people by continuing to hold the school-led system to account for the outcomes, progress and destinations of all learners. Additionally, the local authority will promote the importance of mental health and wellbeing across all strands of its work with schools, setting and other partners.

The local authority will provide strategic opportunities for schools and settings to develop partnerships which promote and foreground mental health and wellbeing. The Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) will continue to be integrated into the existing education

and clinical landscapes, and further work will be delivered on the whole school approach and on co-production with children and young people.

The local authority's traded services all contain strands of work which tie back to wellbeing and mental health including support for governors on their strategic role in monitoring the wellbeing of staff and children; developing safeguarding practice which upholds the wellbeing of all children and young people; behaviour and attendance support; educational psychology and an inclusive work experience programme.

The wellbeing of school leaders and staff is paramount, and the local authority will continue to offer programmes of support to address the mounting challenges caused by the pandemic. The programmes include coaching support for school leaders, the Educational Psychology service, staff wellbeing toolkits and enhanced pastoral support as part of the adviser programme.

As we move on from the recent unparalleled period across the globe, East Sussex is determined to renew its commitment to Excellence for All.

Leaders at all levels in the education services are ambitious for the children and young people they serve. A rich curriculum, extensive extra-curricular opportunities, a wide range of academic and vocational courses, superb teaching – this is our ambitious offer to ensure that this generation in our settings, schools and colleges thrives as never before.