

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 8 March 2016

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: The Inspection of East Sussex County Council's arrangements for supporting school improvement

Purpose: The report sets out the outcome of the inspection of the Council's arrangements for supporting school improvement which took place in November 2015

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to note the outcomes of the inspection and that an action plan is being developed to address the areas of improvement.

1 Background

1.1 On 11 January Ofsted published the inspection letter following the inspection in, November 2015, of the Council's arrangements for supporting school improvement. Ofsted no longer provide a grade for the inspection. Instead they provide a narrative and confirm whether or not the service will be re-inspected. The letter recognises the significant progress we have made and Ofsted has not identified a need to re-inspect the service (see Appendix 1).

1.2 The service was previously inspected in June 2014 when the arrangements were judged to be ineffective. An action plan was agreed and where possible, resources within the Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service budget and staffing were re-prioritised. An additional £870,000 was identified from Dedicated Schools Grant funds and the Corporate Transformation Fund to fund the improvements. The inspection letter notes '*the impact of the local authority's strategy for improvement, 'Excellence for All', and work to ensure the quality of its own advisers and brokered services since the last inspection, is clear*'. The letter also notes '*The council's financial investment in improving schools' effectiveness and outcomes, particularly in the primary phase, is having a positive impact.*'

2 Supporting information

2.1 The key focus of the inspection is the impact of improvement activity and the difference this is making to the performance of schools and the outcomes for children and young people.

2.2 The findings of the inspection are based on discussions with officers, elected members, head teachers, principals and governors and examining a wide range of documentation. In addition the inspectors took account of feedback from eight inspections and telephone calls to 18 maintained schools and academy leaders in the week prior to the inspection.

2.3 Key findings include:

- The commitment of Members, officers and school leaders to improving the quality of education provision and outcomes. There is a consensus of shared responsibility for all East Sussex children and young people to ensure that none is left behind.

- All stakeholders, from lead members and the chief executive to senior officers and their teams, are absolutely clear about what the council is trying to achieve.
- Headteachers and governing bodies have greater confidence in local authority local leaders than in recent years. Schools report, and indeed welcome, greater challenge and rigour in the local authority work.
- The youngest children and pupils in East Sussex are now getting a much better start to their education. The proportion of early years providers judged good or better is similar to the national picture.
- The impact of the local authority's work is evident in the improving profile of inspection outcomes in primary schools.
- Standards at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 have improved year-on-year since 2013. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at age five has risen significantly, placing East Sussex in the top 10% of local authorities in 2015. Overall, achievement at age seven is now significantly above national figures, although not always at the higher levels.
- There are signs that the gap between children eligible for free school meals and those who are not is beginning to narrow at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Support for pupils in the local authority care and vulnerable 16 – 17 year olds continues to be a strength.
- The local authority has successfully increased the participation of the youngest children and older students.

2.4 The letter also identified five areas for improvement:

- facilitate further development of school-to-school support, ensuring that schools increasingly take responsibility as system leaders and that all stakeholders understand the benefits and costs of collaborative work
- improve officers' analysis of data and precision of self-evaluation and action planning so as to identify exactly what still needs to improve and how success will be measured
- use a wider range of performance indicators to monitor the attainment and progress of all key groups of pupils at all ability levels, keeping a particular focus on those known to be eligible for free school meals
- work with schools and other partners to improve Level 3 attainment
- increase the challenge to schools to take greater responsibility for pupils at risk of exclusion and to reduce rates of absence to ensure pupils at all key stages attend school regularly.

2.5 An action plan is being developed to address the areas for improvement and these will be incorporated into Excellence for All, the Local Authority's strategy for school improvement. No additional resource will be required.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the report and to note that an action plan will be developed to address the areas for improvement, which will be incorporated into Excellence for All. The action plan will be shared with Ofsted.

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