Schools Causing Concern
Report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

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Lancashire
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Introduction

Lancashire has the highest number of maintained schools in England (554 compared to next at 486) and the majority of schools are successful with 90% achieving a good or outstanding Ofsted rating.

Many schools do at some stage undergo a period of uncertainty for a whole range of reasons. These are usually resolved by the schools, their staff and governors, either by their own efforts or with outside support, and do not impact significantly upon the standards or the education of children. However, where schools need additional help, a traded service is offered by the county council where support can be purchased by schools in matters such as finance, governor services and school improvement.

What is a school 'causing concern'?

A school can be identified as 'causing concern' for a number of reasons and the county council has a range of criteria:

- An Ofsted inspection has categorised the schools as either in special measures, having serious weaknesses, or requiring improvement

- Concerns over standards of achievement, quality of teaching, leadership and management, behaviour and safety, safeguarding

- Recommendation from school adviser to area team leader

- Recommendations from either a schools' financial services manager or a senior area personnel officer

The common ingredients for challenging schools can include (but not limited to) recent changes in leadership, declining numbers on roll or financial deficits.

Schools receive bespoke support from the county council which can be provided in the short term or in some cases, over many years.

Department for Education guidance

To support local authorities and Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC) on how to work with schools to support improvements, and on using their intervention powers, guidance is provided by the Department for Education. This guidance describes the

processes local authorities and RSCs may take in schools that are eligible for intervention. These include:

- Schools that have failed to comply with a warning notice.

- Schools that have been judged inadequate by Ofsted.

This guidance is statutory for local authorities, and sets out their role in relation to maintained schools that are identified as 'causing concern'.

Background to the Review

A special meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee was held on 12 April 2018, to review a call-in request on a decision taken by Cabinet to close Hameldon Community College in Burnley. At this meeting, the Committee heard that despite the best efforts of the school and the continued, long term support of the local authority, Hameldon Community College had been unable to make sustained improvements. Concerns were raised following this meeting as to the level of support provided to schools 'in difficulty' and the impact on families as a result of a school closure.

As a result, at the Education Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2018, members were provided with a detailed report and presentation on 'the journey of schools causing concern'. The report provided details on the package of support provided to schools by the county council that are deemed to be 'in difficulty' through the school improvement and finance teams, and included information on the impact to services such as school admissions and place planning.

Our comprehensive study arose following a discussion at this meeting. It was felt that given the volume and broad range of information considered by the Education Scrutiny Committee, it would be more beneficial to commission a task and finish group to undertake this work on behalf of the Committee to further explore the challenges facing schools 'causing concern' in Lancashire.

About this Report

Our principle aim in undertaking this work was to further understand what constitutes a school categorised as 'causing concern', the provision to these schools from the county council and the pressures faced by schools.

Our task group met on 7 separate occasions, considered a number of reports and documentation (detailed on page 25 of this report), and met with a variety of Lancashire County Council officers.

The purpose of our work was primarily focused on gathering background information, reviewing case studies on schools categorised as 'causing concern' and interviewing officers from various county council services that support schools such as:

- School Improvement Service
- Schools Finance
- Governor Services
- School Place Planning

In addition, we sought to understand how the support is viewed from a service user's perspective. Two headteachers (representing primary and secondary schools from different areas across the county) contributed to our review by sharing their experiences working with the county council services to overcome the challenges faced managing a school categorised as 'causing concern'. Both headteachers were new to the role when taking on their schools.

Recommendations

This report reflects the views and recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the county council. In many cases, suggestions are made for further consideration to be given to issues, and this would need to include a full assessment of the legal and financial risks and implications.

Objective	Recommendation	Timeframe
Responsibility: School Improvement Service		
Enhancement of support provision to headteachers	a. To review communication mechanisms where a school has been identified as 'causing concern' to ensure headteachers and Chairs of Governors are informed of process in a timely manner to support the headteacher with the ongoing communication with school staff, governors, parents etc.	Within 3 months
	b. To evaluate the mentor process provided by the county council to ensure allocation is suitable to the individual needs of a new headteacher at a vulnerable school taking into account the schools concerns.	Within 3 months
	c. To assess support and training provided during a newly appointed headteachers induction, to include the option of a sustainable programme of finance and business management training where required.	Within 3 months
	d. To review and identify alternative training delivery methods (such as podcasts, webinars, on-site training etc) to provide headteachers with alternative options to improve accessibility.	6 – 12 months
	e. Consideration to be given to organising workshops between experienced headteachers and future potential headteachers to assist with a more comprehensive understanding of the role, sharing of experiences and good practice.	6 - 12 months

	f. To provide further support to previously vulnerable schools to help rebuild trust within the community and other schools in the locality.	6 – 12 months
	g. To review whether a package of support to identified vulnerable schools could be made available prior to the point of becoming categorised as a school causing concern.	3 – 6 months

Responsibility: Schools Finance/Schools Advisory Service

To enhance the current service provision with a focus on prevention rather than intervention.	a. Schools advisor visits to include more of a focus around finance and staffing to ensure any vulnerable position is identified early so the right level of support can be provided before the point of crisis.	Within 3 months
	b. To review the current new headteacher support to include a mechanism within the mentor role to provide guidance on finance, budgeting and staffing.	3 – 6 months
	c. To review the School Improvement Challenge Board criteria used to include staff mobility and staffing budgets.	6 – 12 months
	d. Consideration to be given for a review to be undertaken on the effect on school financial stability in relation to the EHC plan funding allocation timescales and special school placement challenges through Schools Forum.	Within 3 months

Responsibility: Governor Services

To support: An increase to the pool of school governors across Lancashire. School governing bodies to be reflective of the community their	a. To review current methods to support recruitment of school governors to increase numbers and diversity to include: • The Cabinet Member of Children, Young People and Schools to send a letter to financial institutions and local employers to promote the role of school governor through newsletters to staff. • Inclusion on school applications for parents/carers to indicate interest in school governor role. • Potential to discuss school governor role in headteacher exit interviews.	Within 3 months

school serves. All school governors' confidence to fulfil their role as a 'critical friend' and to challenge where required to ensure the best outcomes for its pupils.	b. County Council to sign up to the Inspiring Governance School Governor Champions Charter to encourage LCC staff to consider role as part of continuous professional development.	Within 3 months
	c. A review of the current governor training provision subject matter and alternative training delivery methods with a view to increasing accessibility and encouraging attendance.	Within 3 months
	d. A review of the mechanism for school governors to contribute to full governing body meeting agendas where the county council provide this service.	Within 3 months

Membership of the Group

Our task group members included:

- Ian Brown (chair)

- Andrea Kay

- Cosima Towneley

- Jenny Purcell (until March 2019) / Stephen Clarke (from March 2019)

- Bernard Dawson

- Lorraine Beavers

- John Potter

- Jayne Rear (chair until May 2019)

Officers

Our work programme was supported by the following officers who provided us with relevant support, guidance and information and attended our meetings as appropriate.

From Lancashire County Council:

- Steve Belbin, Acting Director of Education and Skills

- Andrew Good, Head of Financial Management (Development and Schools)

- Alison Hartley, Senior Advisor (Secondary/Post 16 Group)

- Alison Mitchell, Senior Advisor (Monitoring & Intervention)

- Neil Smith, Schools and Childcare Financial Services Manager

- Ajay Sethi, Head of Education & Skills

- Margaret Scrivens, School Based Issues Officer

- Mel Ormesher, Head of Asset Management

- Sarah Callaghan, Director of Education and Skills

- Craig Alker, Business Support Officer

From schools:

- Deanne Marsh, Headteacher, Bacup St Saviour's Community Primary School

- Paul Scarborough, Headteacher, Upholland High School

School Improvement Service

Background

The county council's School Improvement Service provides a number of bespoke services to support schools depending on need including:

- Teaching & learning consultant support

- Attendance and behaviour consultants

- Assessment support

- Adviser support for leadership and management

- Training

A key element of the support to schools is the Advisory Service which provides support, guidance and advice working in partnership with schools. This service can be purchased through the School Service Guarantee (SSG), which a high number of schools have bought into.

The Advisory Service monitors the performance of schools in Lancashire, works with school leaders and serves to provide critical challenge as well as support. Further to this, the Advisory Service reviews all schools on a termly basis.

We heard that where a school has been identified as 'causing concern', the headteacher and chair of governors would be informed verbally of the reasons in advance, and then confirmed in writing. It is expected that the headteacher and chair of governors would make the matter known within the school, since the purpose of the arrangement is to support schools in addressing agreed targets for improvement. The governing body would then be involved in monitoring the progress made towards the agreed targets.

> **Role of the School Improvement Challenge Board**

The School Improvement Challenge Board (SICB) has a responsibility to challenge the impact of support provided by the county council to a school categorised as 'causing concern' and information is presented through evaluations on a six monthly basis.

The criteria used to prompt the school's attendance at SICB can include:

- Lack of significant progress towards one or more targets following the presentations of two evaluations.

- Ofsted reports raising significant concerns on the capacity of the leadership team to make the required improvements in a timely manner.

- Lack of progress in submitting a recovery plan or ongoing financial concern following the approval of a recovery plan/withdrawal of delegation.

- Ongoing and significant HR issues which are detrimental to the capacity of the school to meet targets in a timely manner.

This criteria is not exhaustive as there may be other situations where attendance at SICB may be required.

We were informed that should support not be successful, the SICB could consider sending a pre warning letter to the school outlining the concerns of the county council and steps the school will need to take to address these.

> **Criteria for the issue of a Pre Warning Letter**

Local authorities have the option of issuing a warning notice (effectively a pre warning letter) to maintained schools under the following circumstances:

1. The standard of performance of pupils at the school is unacceptably low and is likely to remain so.

2. There has been a serious breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed which is prejudicing, or likely to prejudice, such standards of performance.

3. The safety of pupils or staff at the school is threatened (whether by a breakdown of discipline or otherwise).

4. The governing body have failed to comply with a provision of an order under section 122 of the Education Act 2002 (teachers' pay and conditions) that applies to a teacher at the school; or the governing body have failed to secure that the head teacher of the school complies with such a provision.

Should this be unsuccessful, then a formal warning letter is sent informing the school that it is now eligible for intervention by the Secretary of State and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Findings

To further understand the support provided through the School Improvement Service, two headteachers were invited by our task group to discuss and provide information on their experiences managing a school 'causing concern' which highlighted the following key areas:

➤ **Support to headteachers**

We heard that in relation to the pre warning letter phase, there was viewed to be a feeling of vulnerability across the whole school for the headteacher to manage, particularly around staff stability and the wider impact this can have on the perceptions of the school from the local community. This can further exacerbate issues and limit the ability to successfully address concerns. Our members felt that there could be scope for more support to be provided at this stage to help headteachers manage the challenges and the impact, not only with staff but with governors.

When questioned on the support available as a new headteacher, we were informed that the county council provide a service for new headteachers where they are allocated an experienced headteacher as a mentor to provide support and advice. However, it was established that for new headteachers taking on a challenging school, the mentor allocation may not be appropriate to the needs of the new headteacher and the challenges faced by the school, which then restricts the advice that could be provided and in turn limits the success of the support.

➤ **Headteacher training**

Our task group discussed whether it was felt that the pathway to becoming a headteacher continued to provide the right training for potential new headteachers to successfully take on the role, with the current challenges faced by schools in light of reducing budgets. Given that both headteachers interviewed were new to the role, it was highlighted that there is seen to be a potential gap in training around finance and business management which new headteachers are then not prepared for particularly when taking on a school categorised as 'causing concern'. We also recognised that new headteachers would also encounter difficulties in taking the time required to attend training to provide the necessary tools to support their role.

We were concerned that this could impede new headteachers progress and resilience in the role and felt that there was a need to ensure that the induction provided to newly appointed headteachers included an option for sustainable ongoing support and training around business and finance. Further to this, it was suggested that to support potential headteachers as part of the career pathway, workshops from experienced headteachers could be provided to share their knowledge and good practice.

> ➢ **Restoring trust**

Our group were informed that both headteachers had successfully managed the journey of a school categorised as 'causing concern' to a more stable position. An important part of this journey was restoring the trust and confidence of neighbouring schools and the local community, as we recognised that the impact of a school in crisis was wide ranging and can have long term consequences. Our group heard that considerable work and time (12 to 18 months) was undertaken by the secondary school headteacher to restore trust and confidence in the local primary schools through meeting with primary headteachers. In addition, both headteachers discussed work undertaken with the community (including organising parent forums in partnership with those primary schools) which highlighted that more work could be undertaken through the county council to establish mechanisms to enable schools to work more closely together on a local footprint and in a cross phase approach (nursery, primary, secondary, special schools etc) to assist schools to help build and maintain relationships.

> ➢ **Prevention**

Underpinning this work, it was recognised that a focus on prevention was key to building school resilience and to recognise concerns before reaching the point of crisis. And, alongside the potential for more cross phase working in localities to enable more school to school support, is the potential to offer peer to peer support with schools nationally, not just locally that may be in a similar position.

> ➢ **SICB criteria**

From the discussions with the headteachers in relation to the work of SICB, and in particular the criteria used by the board to identify concerns, our task group felt that it would be useful to review the criteria used with headteachers who have experienced

working with the board with a view to including additional criteria such as staff mobility and staffing budgets which could be early indicators of a school in difficulty.

'Fight or flight, how 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation' report

A recent report published by Ofsted titled 'Fight or flight, how 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation' draws on research visits to 20 schools across the UK, 10 of which have been graded less than good consistently for 13 years or more and are considered as 'stuck'. With regards to school improvement support, this report highlighted:

"There were mixed reviews about the effect and quality of school improvement partners. Some schools remembered historically quite large teams of senior leaders being sent to the school from the LA. This was viewed as supportive but in all cases the school remained stuck afterwards. Schools were more positive about their recent encounters with SIPs. These individuals were either attached to their MATs or from an outstanding school in the local area. Advice is welcomed when it is more practical and when the relationship with the school is sustained".

Schools Finance Service

Background

It was reported that the county council has responsibilities for maintained schools, particularly around accounting support and support for Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD). Part of these responsibilities includes:

- Preparing the budgets for all maintained schools and academies in Lancashire.

- Challenging the financial environment of the school to ensure the school is sustainable.

Following increasing costs and rising demands in recent years, we were advised that schools have faced an unprecedented pressure on their budgets. This, as well as the per-pupil funding not keeping up with the rate of inflation, has led to many schools having to utilise reserves to set their school budgets.

> **Lancashire Schools in Deficit**

Our group were informed that as of March 2019, out of the 554 maintained schools in Lancashire, 39 were in deficit which equated to around 7% of all schools.

The county council provides significant targeted support, enhanced monitoring and early warning system around SIFD.

The SIFD system classifies schools into one of four categories based on various financial indicators:

Category	Description
Category 1 - Structural Deficit	Structural deficit beyond recovery, school is financially nonviable, strategic solutions required.
Category 2 - Significant Deficit	Schools have significant deficits requiring intensive intervention and focussed support to recover, or have no agreed recovery plan.
Category 3 - Vulnerable Position	Incorporates schools burning through reserves, losing significant pupil numbers, moving into or on the brink of deficit, or schools that are recovering from more significant financial problems, but where the recovery plan is agreed and is on track - require intervention and monitoring in order to prevent failure in the next 3 years.
Category 4 - No financial issues	No budget issues but continued monitoring of financial indicators to confirm ongoing financial health.

We were assured that the school data used in the categorisation process is kept under regular review, against the agreed categories.

It was reported that the longer term viability of schools within Category 1 is considered questionable and consideration is given to further actions by the county council at a strategic level, including possible closure of the school.

Support is provided for schools in categories 2 and 3, either via targeted support or through the standard support offered by the traded Schools Financial Services offer.

Finally, although schools in Category 4 have no current budget issues, monitoring of the financial indicators would still continue to confirm any ongoing financial health issues.

➢ **Early Warning Process**

Our group were informed that the Early Warning Process was introduced by the Schools Finance team to provide assistance to schools in identifying possible future financial issues. Financial data is analysed and letters issued to schools that trigger certain thresholds. These thresholds are:

- County council forecasts a surplus at year end but balances are reducing by 70% or more;

- County council forecasts a deficit at year end that was not anticipated on the school's Income & Expenditure return;

- School Number on Roll has fallen by 10% or more since the previous October.

➢ **Enhanced Financial Training**

On a question raised around finance training, we heard that a series of financial seminars were held during 2018 aimed at primary and nursery schools. Further enhanced training was held in 2019 and focussed mainly on the secondary sector.

➢ **Schools Forum**

As well as support provided to schools through the schools finance service, the Schools Forum advises the county council on matters relating to school funding and has certain decision making powers. The county council takes into account views expressed or the decisions taken by the Forum in setting out the schools budget. This is a statutory body made up from representatives of headteachers, governing bodies and of other relevant organisations within Lancashire.

Findings

From discussions with the two headteachers interviewed on the financial challenges faced by their schools, our group were informed that both headteachers were unaware of any financial concerns within the schools on commencement of employment. However it was quickly established that both schools were viewed to have unrealistic staffing structures impacting on schools budgets, and forecasted

budget deficits. This raised concerns with our group members as to the county councils early understanding or awareness of the schools financial situation.

Further concerns raised by headteachers included the potential impact the statutory timescales (20 weeks) in place for the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan process on a schools budget.

Our group heard that where a pupil presents with a potential special education need (where they require more support than the school is able to provide), a request can be made for an EHC needs assessment to be undertaken. As it stands, this process has a statutory timescale of 20 weeks for the final plan to be issued, depending on the outcome of the initial assessment as to whether and EHC plan is required.

It was highlighted that the 20 weeks' timescale can have a significant impact on a schools budget, in particular where the EHC plan had not been previously put in place. In addition, once the process had been completed, it may determine that the school would not be best placed to meet the need of that pupil and that a place at a special school would be required. Further impact could then be placed on the school financially should there not be a place available at a special school so the school is then required to fund appropriate support until a place becomes available.

Concerns were raised as to the impact this timescale has on the ongoing school financial stability, particularly where schools are already showing financial difficulties and felt that a further review of all schools across Lancashire could be undertaken to understand the full extent of impact this has on schools.

Governor Services

Background

A school governing body provides non-executive leadership and there are currently over 8500 governors in Lancashire schools. In all matters, the governing body should operate at a strategic level, leaving the headteacher and senior management team responsible and accountable for the operational day-to-day running of the school.

In maintained schools, the governing body sets and approves the budget, defines expectations, delegates powers, and verifies performance towards delivering the schools' strategic aims and objectives.

The county council's Governor Services provides support to meet the variety of school governor needs in Lancashire.

This support includes guidance on model policies and governance procedures, recruitment of governors, training and development of governors.

➢ **Recruitment**

Governor vacancies reduce the effectiveness of governing bodies as they limit the range of experience available and increases the workload of other governors.

We were keen to understand the challenges and the work undertaken to address governor recruitment issues, and it was highlighted that a recruitment campaign has been in place since October 2017 which has included the following methods:

- Area based news releases
- Staff notices
- Social media posts (such as Facebook and Twitter)

However, it was established that the campaign has had limited success and further work was being undertaken including linking in with the National Governance Association (NGA) and 'Inspiring Governance' to organise governor recruitment roadshows across the County.

In addition, our members were advised that a campaign had been launched by Inspiring Governance which aimed to better inform employers of the work of school governors to offer support to their employees who wanted to become a governor.

➢ **Increasing Diversity**

We raised the question of diversity and it was established that for the county council, increasing the diversity of governors continues to be a key focus to ensure that governing bodies reflect the communities they serve. From this review it was highlighted that more recently, the NGA had produced a guide 'The Right People around the Table' which was promoted via the Chairs' Forums and included on the governor webpages of the schools' portal. This document provides information and practical tips on the recruitment of governors. In addition, diversity was promoted in training courses provided by the county council included as part of the new 2019 Lancashire Skills Audit.

> ➢ **Training and Development**

As well as reviewing their constitution annually, governing bodies complete their annual skills audit and identify any gaps in the skills occupied by the governing body.

A key aspect of the training and development offer is to support governors in understanding their role and responsibility in key areas.

It was reported that the county council continues to review and to provide a significant training programme for governors across the county. In 2018/19, it was reported that there were approximately 265 courses held for governor training, with around 4000 governors in attendance. However, this number was only half of the number of governors in Lancashire.

It was established that where schools purchase the training and development service level agreement (SLA), free access to the NGA E learning - called 'Learning Link' is provided. The NGA Learning Link offers flexible e-learning to help governors and chairs develop their learning skills and knowledge. There are currently 94% of schools in Lancashire who have purchased this SLA.

Findings

From the information provided, our task group felt that there continued to be a number of challenges in relation to:

- Recruitment of governors across Lancashire

- Accessibility to training and workshops

- Diversity of governing bodies to mirror community in which the schools based

In addition, information provided by both headteachers indicated concerns particularly around the following areas:

- Ability to challenge school leadership teams

- Understanding and challenging school budgets and staffing

- Upskilling existing governors and building confidence in new governors

With regards to training, although there is a variety of training and workshops available, our task group felt that consideration should be given to how the training is accessed utilising IT based solutions i.e. webinars or podcasts. It was

acknowledged that work had begun in relation to this but that further work through the current LCC digital strategy project was required across the whole of the county council to be able to achieve this.

We discussed the support provision for the full governing body termly meetings where the school has bought into the service provided by the county council. Part of this service includes the production of agendas and clerking support to the full governing body meetings. A number of standing items are included on the agendas and it was established that agenda items are primarily agreed through the headteacher and chair of governors. As some of our task group members were school governors, it was felt from experience that the mechanism used to determine agenda items did not necessarily allow for governors serving on the governing body to contribute to the agenda. A question was then raised as to how reflective the full governing body agendas are to the needs of the individual school to enable appropriate and constructive challenge where required.

> To further illustrate the concerns raised by the task group, the Ofsted report on 'Fight or flight, how 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation' identified that:
>
> *"In all stuck schools, governance and oversight were reported to be very weak. Most governors felt they did not have the knowledge or skills to challenge senior leadership teams. Often, the governors were led by the school, rather than the other way round".*
>
> *"Sometimes, governors recognised how they could be easily led by senior leaders. The proliferation of internal performance data has not helped this situation, in which governors find themselves bamboozled by senior leaders".*

School Place Planning Service

Background

Local authorities have a statutory duty in relation to mainstream school place commissioning. The School Place Provision Strategy 2017/19 to 2019/20 is in place to inform all future place planning and set a framework for discussions with schools.

The School Place Provision Strategy underpins the county council's process for ensuring sufficient school places across Lancashire at the right time and in the right location. Members noted that the county council's planning and forecasting is currently within the 1% +/- range for accuracy nationally.

> **Free Schools**

Since the introduction of free schools, there are two routes for the commissioning of a new free school which are:

- The Presumption route, which means the school had been commissioned by a Local Authority.

- The Central route, which means that the school's sponsors would apply directly to Central Government.

The county council has not yet commissioned any new free schools via the Presumption route. However, a number of free schools and University Technical College's (UTC) have been established in Lancashire via the Central route.

New DfE guidance on 'Opening and closing maintained schools' has been released (November 2019) which now provides local education authorities with the option of opening new maintained schools rather than free schools.

> **Impact of smaller building projects on local schools**

The Local Planning Authority (in Lancashire, this means the 12 district councils) takes into account priorities (e.g. need for affordable housing and viability) when determining what recommendations are put forward for decision in relation to housing developments. This would involve advance feedback from the county council of the likely impact of strategic sites and negotiation of mitigation measures which would be required to enable a site to come forward.

In addition to the individual assessment of site impact, the county council works closely with the strategic planners at each district on the preparation of their Local Plans.

Our task group also recognised that central government, in April 2019, issued new guidance on developer contributions. This guidance intended to ensure that developers make a financial contribution towards the provision of sufficient school

places where the increase in demand directly relates to the provision of new housing.

> ➢ **Managing impact on school places as result of an academy closure**

The mixed economy of academies and maintained schools presents authorities with challenges around the school planning function. Where the local authority is the decision maker in the event of a maintained school closing, it must take into consideration a number of factors such as the availability of alternative, quality provision, as part of the statutory process.

However, academy closure decisions are made by the Secretary of State, who can decide to withdraw the funding agreement. Where such a decision is made, the county council is required to find alternative places for the displaced pupils.

Updated guidance (November 2019) from the DfE on 'Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreement' sets out, where a closure of an academy has been agreed mutually with the Secretary of State, the processes academy trusts need to follow and provides guidance as to when academy trusts should talk to other parties. Relevant local authorities will then be able to advise on the availability of alternative places and will be required to run a preference exercise to find an alternative place for any displaced pupils. It advised that this process must begin at the earliest stage feasible to allow for choices to be made, places to be found and for disruption to be minimised.

Findings

From the information provided on school place planning in response to the task groups concerns, it was recognised that the processes and procedures utilised by the school place planning team were well established yet flexible, to incorporate the regular guidance updates from the DfE. As such, it was felt that there were no recommendations required at this time.

Conclusion

The work of our task group has been a well-timed exploration into the challenges faced by the specialist support services provided by the county council to those maintained schools across Lancashire categorised as 'causing concern'.

From the reviews conducted across the areas identified by the task group, it was concluded that there is a significant resource provided by the county council to schools focussing primarily on 'intervention' to support schools at the point of concern. However, the challenge will be for the county council to refocus its attention to 'prevention'; to support schools well to reduce the need for intervention.

Further to this is the scope to broaden the provision of advice and guidance to Lancashire schools, by connecting more effectively to schools nationally to share best practice. In addition, this could afford the opportunity to provide peer to peer support with schools in similar situations nationally rather than focusing locally.

However, our task group, in exploring this area of work, recognised the important relationship the county council have with schools and the considerable respect shown by schools for the variety and level of services provided by the county council.

In addition, despite the challenges highlighted, our members were keen to acknowledge the considerable time undertaken by school governors across Lancashire, which is a purely voluntary but critical function, and stressed the growing demands faced in fulfilling the duties required of this role.

This task and finish group is grateful for the support and advice of those who provided information and evidence to support its work

Glossary

DfE	Department for Education
EHC	Education, Health and Care (Plan)
HR	Human Resources
LCC	Lancashire County Council
LA	Local Authority
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NGA	National Governance Association
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SICB	School Improvement Challenge Board
SIFD	Schools in Financial Difficulty
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SSG	School Service Guarantee

Documents

[DfE Schools Causing Concern Guidance](#)

[Education Act 2006 Schools Causing Concern](#)

[Item 4 Education Scrutiny Committee meeting 10.09.18](#)

[Schools Forum Annual report](#)

[Methodology for Education Contributions in Lancashire](#)

[Securing developer contributions for education](#)

[DfE Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreement](#)

[Lancashire School Improvement Challenge Board](#)

[Schools in financial difficulty criteria 2018](#)

[2019 CPD Framework for teachers, school leaders and school support staff](#)

[Lancashire School Place Provision Strategy](#)

[Lancashire Schools Forum](#)

[The Right People around the Table - Guide to Recruiting Governors](#)

[DfE Opening and Closing Maintained Schools](#)

[Fight or Flight - How Stuck Schools are Overcoming Isolation](#)

Websites

School Admissions bite size briefing

https://lancashire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/372870

Lancashire Professional Development Service
https://lccsecure.lancashire.gov.uk/lpds/courses.asp?q=governor

Community Infrastructure Levy

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy

National Governance Association
https://www.nga.org.uk/Home.aspx

Education and Employers working together for young people

Inspiring the Future connecting schools and colleges with thousands of volunteers from the world of work

Primary Futures broadening aspirations by helping children grasp the link between learning and their futures

Inspiring Governance connecting skilled volunteers interested in serving as school governors with schools

Research latest research, seminars and conferences