

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on 21 October 2014

Electoral Division affected: All

A summary of partnership arrangements amongst Lancashire schools.

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

There are a wide range of partnerships between schools in Lancashire which are invaluable in helping schools to improve the quality of education they provide and these partnerships are constantly evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities.

The report outlines the purpose and range of school partnership arrangements across Lancashire. It also sets out the local authority's strategies to promote partnership working between schools.

Recommendation

The Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to receive the report and to give its views on the current arrangements for school partnerships in Lancashire.

Background and Advice

School partnerships in Lancashire

There is a clear recognition in Lancashire that school to school partnerships are extremely important in ensuring that schools continue to improve in a sustainable way. These partnerships have a variety of purposes including:

- Providing pastoral support
- Providing focussed school improvement support
- Developing and sharing good practice
- Leading and co-ordinating responses to local priorities
- Procuring and developing services

Whilst many partnerships fulfil many, or all, of the above functions the information below sets out some of the arrangements which are currently in place in Lancashire.

School clusters

Most schools in Lancashire belong to a localised cluster of schools with headteachers meeting regularly to discuss topical issues and concerns. These clusters vary enormously in the level of engagement and the scope of their activities but generally consist of different types of schools including Voluntary Aided schools, Community schools and Academies. At the more limited end of the spectrum they are a valuable source of pastoral support, both in identifying when colleagues are experiencing difficulties and in helping them to overcome those challenges. On the other hand some clusters are also highly effective in coordinating professional development for member schools and in sharing best practice across the cluster and tackling local issues. In a recent review of school partnerships primary headteachers highlighted the importance of all schools belonging to a cluster so that they do not become professionally isolated.

Brokered partnerships

School to school support is an essential part of the landscape of school improvement. Headteachers, staff and governors play a crucial role in improving the quality of provision across Lancashire and the local authority relies heavily upon the support of effective schools when coordinating and leading school improvement. Many partnerships are arranged between individual schools but the local authority has a key role in brokering partnerships along with other key stakeholders such as Diocesan and Church Authorities. The level of assistance varies greatly from school to school but it often includes brokering temporary leadership from a strong school and identifying highly effective teachers to work in schools in need. Sometimes the brokered partnership can lead to a federated governing body where the two schools have joint governance arrangements whilst retaining their own identity

Formal school partnerships

In parts of Lancashire there are very strong collaborative arrangements with groups of schools establishing companies to formalise their partnerships. In West Lancashire a group of schools based around Skelmersdale have established a company called SHARES which offers a range of support to member schools. SHARES Lancashire Ltd is a leading provider of services to the education sector delivering services to both member and non-member schools. These arrangements provide school to school support, pastoral support, and also enable schools to pool resources to procure services efficiently and meet local needs and priorities. A number of other similar organisations have developed in recent years across Lancashire.

Teaching school alliances

Teaching school alliances have been developed over the past few years as they have been designated by central government. There are 10 teaching schools in Lancashire and they cover a range of functions including:

Initial Teacher Training

Continuing Professional Development for groups of schools

School to school support

Identifying and developing leadership potential

Developing and deploying specialist leaders in education
Carrying out research and development
These schools provide a valuable resource for school improvement in Lancashire.

Partnerships between schools in the same phase of education

Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special schools have developed associations which enable them to work together more effectively. These associations vary in size and scope but they all help schools to communicate with the local authority as well as raise issues on a regional basis. Concerns are also raised with colleagues and strategies to tackle them are shared.

What is the local authority doing to promote partnership working between schools?

The local authority has led the establishment of a group of secondary headteachers (the Strategic Overview Group) who meet regularly to review the priorities facing schools in Lancashire and to play a leading role in developing strategies to tackle areas of concern. For example, the Strategic Overview Group has worked with the local authority to organise group of schools who are working together to raise the achievement of pupils eligible for Free School Meals at Key stage 4. A website has also been developed to enable schools to access support from one another.

In the primary phase a series of meetings to consider partnership working were held with headteachers in July 2014 and a steering group has been established to develop school to school partnership working. A website has been created to share good practice and to ensure that headteachers can access support from teaching schools and national and local leaders in education. The local authority is gathering information from school clusters so that individual schools and groups can see what others are doing across the county. This will also help to ensure that all primary schools have the opportunity to be part of a cluster arrangement.

The local authority is a key broker for developing school to school support. The brokerage role of the local authority is highly valued by schools as the team of advisers have a very good overview of the capacity of schools to offer support. The advisers also know the schools well enough to ensure that support is closely matched to need and context. These partnerships are frequently brokered for all schools judged by OfSTED to require improvement or to be inadequate and there is a strong track record of sustained success.

The local authority works closely with the Lancashire headteacher associations to gather headteacher views on educational issues and to work with them on shared concerns.

The local authority works closely with Diocesan and Church Authorities to ensure that effective partnerships are promoted between schools both in denominational groups and also between community and faith schools.

Impact

Over the past few years the proportion of schools judged good or better in OfSTED inspections has risen steadily. Currently, around 85% of Lancashire's schools are

judged good or better compared with the national average of 80%. This success has been achieved, in no small part, through effective school to school partnerships supported and actively promoted by the schools themselves, the local authority and other key stakeholders.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

N/A

Risk management

There are no implications for risk management arising from this report.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A