

## **Education Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting to be held on Monday, 10 September 2018

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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### **The Journey of a School Causing Concern and the Impact on Services**

Contacts for further information:

Stephen Belbin, Head of Service, School Improvement

Mel Ormesher, Head of Asset Management

Debbie Ormerod, Pupil Access Admissions Manager

Alison Mitchell, Senior Adviser, Monitoring and Intervention Team Leader

#### **Executive Summary**

The majority of Lancashire's 631 schools are successful, are self-managing with strong leadership. 91% of Lancashire schools are judged to be good or better. This is above the national average (89%), the North-West average (90%), and places us second against our statistical neighbours.

Many schools do at some stage undergo a period of turmoil or uncertainty. With support and advice from the Local Authority, these issues are usually resolved and do not impact significantly upon the standards or the education of children.

In the rare instances where these issues cannot be resolved internally, the Local Authority reacts proactively to address matters, working with Governors, headteachers and senior leaders.

#### **Recommendation**

The Education Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- i. Note and comment on the report; and
- ii. Discuss and formulate recommendations in relation to the information provided.

#### **Background**

##### **Why might a school cause concern?**

There are a number of reasons why a school may be in difficulty. These typically are due to concerns about standards of achievement, school finances, personnel reasons, a fall in the number on the school roll, or those raised by parents. In addition, concerns may be reported by outside agencies. The school may receive a negative inspection report or concerns about safeguarding may be raised.

Unlike many Local Authorities, Lancashire has retained a strong team of officers who in different capacities support schools and provide advice and guidance. School leaders will often contact the Authority and ask for advice about admissions, attendance, curriculum and assessment or governance. This advice is freely given and the relationship between schools and the Authority is supportive, yet challenging where necessary.

Lancashire also offers a traded service with schools, where schools purchase support in matters such as finance, personnel and school improvement. This is valued by schools, as demonstrated by the high levels of buy back. Our traded service also offers a wide range of training opportunities for all Lancashire staff, which impacts positively on provision in our schools.

In addition, a school may find itself in the spotlight of the media, often due to unfortunate circumstances that are beyond the control of school leaders or governors. In these cases, the media team provides immediate support and advice, as well as other officers.

## **Transparency**

The Local Authority has a range of criteria which are used to identify schools requiring improvement. The criteria are grouped together in five categories:

- Ofsted category: Special Measures, Serious Weaknesses, 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
- Recommendation from schools' financial services manager
- Recommendation from senior area personnel officer

When a school requires improvement, the headteacher and chair of governors will have been informed verbally of the reasons in advance, and this will be confirmed in writing. The names of schools requiring improvement is not a public document, although schools that have been identified by Ofsted as requiring special measures, having serious weaknesses or requiring improvement will be identified through the Ofsted website. It is expected that the headteacher and chair of governors would make the matter known within the school, since the purpose of the arrangements is to support schools in addressing agreed targets for improvement. The governing body will generally be involved in monitoring the progress made towards the agreed targets.

Where schools have been identified as requiring improvement on grounds relating to certain personnel issues, there will need to be careful consideration of the extent, if any, to which information can be shared. Where the school is overstaffed or subject to re-organisation proposals, the information should already be known to staff and governors. However, where personnel or other difficulties relate to potential

competence or disciplinary matters, the information would not be shared with staff, parents or other governors, since there is scope for prejudice to any subsequent proceedings which may be required.

This criteria, established over many years, has been shared with our colleagues in our local Diocesan/Church Authorities, as well as teacher associations.

### **Number of schools**

The number of schools in an Ofsted category of concern is low, below both the national average and the North West. Currently:

- Special Measures: seven schools (1.2% of all Lancashire schools)
- Serious Weaknesses: two schools (0.3% of all Lancashire schools)

In addition, schools may be identified for additional support from School Improvement, finance or personnel teams. This includes schools that have been judged as requiring improvement or those that have fallen below floor and coasting standards.

Currently, ninety-five schools (16%) of Lancashire schools are considered to have educational difficulties and receive support.

There has been a gradual decline in numbers of schools causing concern in the last 10 years. This reflects improvements in the number of schools judged to be good or better, and fewer schools being below floor standards or considered to be coasting. This number has fluctuated, but often coincides when a new inspection framework is introduced or new assessment arrangements are introduced.

However, the number of schools receiving support for financial concerns, or requiring support from School's Personnel is growing. Just under 5% of schools receive support, a significant rise over the last twelve months, and reflects the increasing pressure on budgets within Lancashire schools.

### **Local Authority School Improvement**

Lancashire is strongly supportive of system-led, self-managing school improvement. The advisory service provides support, guidance and advice to schools, working in partnership. This support is purchased through the School Support Guarantee, purchased by 99% of primary schools, all nursery schools and a majority of secondary schools. Other schools may be in a multi-academy trust and receive support for school improvement through other sources.

The role of the school adviser is to work with school leaders on self-evaluation and school priorities. Part of this role is to provide critical challenge, as well as support.

This challenge will be provided through validating judgements, headteacher appraisal, written reports and staff training.

## **Early Warning**

There are many systems for ensuring that schools do not reach a level when they need additional support or intervention. Concerns and vulnerabilities, such as the performance of cohorts or groups of pupils, will be raised with school leaders and recorded in notes of visits. Schools receive a summary of standards every year, through annual reports or notes of visits. School attainment is tracked and performance compared to local and national trends are made. School priorities are reflected in the performance management of headteachers.

As part of the Local Authority's function to monitor the performance of schools across Lancashire, all schools are reviewed by the advisory service on a termly basis. Those identified as causing concern are reviewed by the School Improvement Challenge Board (SICB).

## **Additional Support**

Lancashire has a dedicated team of advisers and consultants that support schools causing concern. The Monitoring and Intervention Team (MIT) has a proven track record of successfully supporting schools tackle underperformance and raise standards of achievement.

The remit of the Monitoring and Intervention team is wide ranging. Each school is provided with a bespoke programme of support relative to the issues identified during the initial baseline audit. Support is provided through the full time and associate advisers (who are themselves headteachers in other schools) to develop the capacity of leadership and management within the school. This includes working alongside governors, senior and middle leaders.

Consultant support is provided through the dedicated teaching and learning consultant team. Remit for this group is to develop the capacity of teaching and learning across the school. In addition to this, the team will broker support from other agencies to support the improvement of teaching. This includes support from the LPDS (Lancashire Professional Development Service) team of consultants, in aspects such as Early Years, able, gifted and talented and Ethnic Minority achievement.

Currently there are 115 schools on the list of schools requiring improvement. The greatest proportion of schools being supported are schools which fall into the serious educational difficulties category (95 schools), with the expectation that early intervention prevents further difficulties. The other 20 schools receive support for personnel or financial reasons. The impact of the early intervention in schools can be seen in the high level of primary schools remaining good or better in terms of an Ofsted judgement.

The Local Authority uses the support and expertise of other Lancashire schools, brokering support from senior leaders and governors to provide support in a timely manner. In the majority of instances, early identification results in improvement. An example is how few schools remain at Requiring Improvement. In the vast majority of instances, Lancashire schools pay for this support from their dedicated budgets. If the school is unable to support this, applications are made to SICB for funding, using money from Schools Forum.

Lancashire has traditionally proactively supported school improvement through bids and projects, such as developing attainment in maths amongst girls, or writing amongst boys. Access to this funding is now very limited.

Some schools are more vulnerable or make slower progress towards improvement. Recent initiatives have included inviting the Headteacher and Chairs of Governing Bodies to SICB to outline their proposed actions for making rapid progress towards targets. SICB has also used Pre Warning Letters as a measure of concern with schools. These schools are monitored closely by SICB as a standing agenda item.

Ultimately, should this support not prove successful, the SICB will consider issuing a Pre-Warning Letter, a written letter outlining the concerns of the authority and the steps the school will need to take to address these. Should this be unsuccessful, then a formal warning letter is written informing the school that it is now eligible for intervention by the Secretary of State and the Regional School Commissioner.

## **Pupil Access**

Parents make an application for primary and secondary schools in the Autumn Term each year. The preferences parents express are often influenced by information received at open evenings, OFSTED ratings, league tables and parental perception in the local community. Members of the Pupil Access Team attend the vast majority of secondary school open evenings and offer advice sessions to Year 6 parents in the primary schools to advise on the secondary school application process and the levels of subscription at local schools. Additionally, the admissions literature provided with the application form, provides the number of preferences expressed for each school for the previous year's intake. It is hoped that the information provided will assist parents with making a wise use of their preferences and encourage them to include a school or academy where their child is likely to secure a place. Regrettably, there remains a misconception that parents have a choice of schools rather than the right to express a preference.

Once all the applications have been received, information is exchanged with neighbouring authorities and then lists are provided to all the own admission authority schools for the governors to rank the pupils against the schools admission criteria. The governors of academies, free schools and church aided schools have responsibility for determining which children have priority for places and for ranking all the pupils who have expressed a preference for their school. The county council ranks the pupils who have expressed a preference for any of the community schools.

Once all the ranked lists have been returned to the Pupil Access Team, a computer algorithm is used to allocate all the places. When making the allocations, the

algorithm offers the highest preference school possible. If a pupil does not have sufficient priority for any of their preferred schools, the nearest Lancashire school with a place available is allocated. In making these allocations there is no consideration of OFSTED categories or how a pupil might make the journey to school. For the September 2018 intake, there were 13,603 primary applications with 91% of parents securing their first preference and 98% of parents offered one of their preferred schools. There were 13,831 secondary applications with 86% of parents securing their first preference and 97% offered one of their preferences.

If parents are unhappy with the school they are offered then they are able to place their child on one or more reserve (waiting) lists for schools that are full and to appeal for any school. Additionally they can change the school that has been allocated to any other school where places remain.

As a result of historical falling numbers and due to market forces, most districts have found one less popular school bearing the brunt of the falling rolls, whilst other schools remain full. When all but one school in an area are full, parents' options to change their allocated school are limited and the number of appeals considered by independent appeal panels increase significantly. In localities where the decline in pupils transferring to secondary school has been reversed it has been necessary to reallocate pupils to schools that are causing concern.

## **School Place Planning**

LCC has a statutory duty to provide a school place to every Lancashire child who wants one.

The School Planning Team assesses need by producing pupil forecasts which take into account birth; planned housing; in-year migration; and previous market share data together with current pupil numbers. By comparing this with the capacity of available schools, future shortfalls can be identified.

The framework for providing places is set out in the [School Place Provision Strategy](#).

Each of the School Improvement, Pupil Access and School Planning teams, together with representatives from School Finance; SEND; Early Years; Property; and 16-19 services have representation on School Development Group, which meets on a regular basis.

These meetings discuss strategic issues for school places and members produce and update the School Place Provision Strategy.

## **Consultations**

N/A

## **Implications**

N/A

## **Risk management**

There are no risks associated with the recommendations contained in the report.

## **Financial**

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations contained in the report.

## **Legal**

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations contained in the report.

Paper  
N/A

Date

Contact/Tel

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A