

County Councillor Phillippa Williamson; Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

Response to the recommendations of the Schools Causing Concern Scrutiny Task and Finish group report

The task and finish group recommended that where applicable the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools give consideration to the recommendations from the report.

I have considered each of the recommendations adopted by the Education Scrutiny Committee and my responses are as follows:

Objective: 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 the process in a timely manner to support the headteacher with the ongoing communication with school staff, governors, parents etc.

Response: *I support this recommendation. The Local Authority risk assessment process which leads to a school being identified as "of concern" will inform a written letter on behalf of the Executive Director advising the Head and Chair of Governors of the initial concerns. A follow up visit by a named school adviser will provide an opportunity to discuss and understand the issues, explore the support available and supporting the management of communication of the situation with staff, governors and parents.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Newly appointed headteachers will continue to be offered a mentoring arrangement with a headteacher in a similar school where they wish to do so. In addition, guidance will be made available for headteachers who are new to mentoring to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of support. Where there is a new headteacher in a school known to be vulnerable additional support for school review will be made available.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. During 2020-21 a new headteacher Continued Professional Development Package will be developed for headteachers both new to headship and new to Lancashire. This will include half termly professional development workshops led by serving and practicing headteachers or school staff from outstanding or good schools, specialist experts or Local Authority officers to focus on areas of particular concern to headteachers. Topics such as*

business and finance; high needs Special Educational Needs and disability, recruitment etc. will be covered.

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. The Lancashire Professional Development Service will develop the use of webinars and other virtual opportunities for training, professional dialogue and support for school leaders. In addition, local education system leaders will develop opportunities for collaborative work on area wide projects to facilitate practice exchange.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. This is called 'system leadership' and the service will move more and more to this strategy over time.*

- f) To provide further support to previously vulnerable schools to help rebuild trust within the community and other schools in the locality.

Response: *I support this recommendation. The new model for school improvement from Sept 2020 is predicated on detailed analysis of a range of data relating to access to and quality of education, as well as the impact of these on education outcomes for all pupils. The locality-based delivery of this support will enable headteachers and governors to share information and ideas in a collaborative partnership rooted in a clear understanding of the needs and priorities for the particular area.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. The Local Authority RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating of schools will ensure that all schools that are vulnerable are advised and supported to swiftly take effective action to address issues that could otherwise lead to their being identified as a school of concern. Such support will be facilitated through partnerships, including the teaching schools, hubs and/or schools within the Integrated Care Partnership area.*

Objective: 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Knowledge of these broader issues will inform adviser visits in schools so that timely support is provided where schools buy in advisory support. Schools that do not buy in will be advised of any concerns within the powers of the Local Authority in writing.*

- b) To review the current new headteacher support to include a mechanism within the mentor role to provide guidance on finance, budgeting and staffing.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Please see my response to the earlier question relating to headteacher mentoring.*

- c) To review the School Improvement Challenge Board (SICB) criteria used to include staff mobility and staffing budgets.

Response: *I support this recommendation. With the revised model of school improvement based on locality footprints, this function will be focussed on the data for evaluating school effectiveness and capacity across each local area. This will be informed by a range of statistical information including statutory assessment outcomes, local area data relating to attendance, exclusions, elective home education and young people who are NEETS (not in employment, education and training) as well as "soft" intelligence such as staff mobility, leadership experience and volatility of school budgets.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. A SEND Sufficiency Strategy was agreed by Cabinet recently that set out a new approach to managing demand in SEND. SEND funding is provided through the High Needs Funding Block and there is ongoing scrutiny on all aspects of the High Needs Funding Block which by regulation falls under the remit of the Schools Forum.*

Objective: **To support an increase to the pool of school governors across Lancashire, school governing bodies to be reflective of the community their school serves and for 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.**

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. The work to encourage suitable governors and an associated campaign is politically led and there are ongoing initiatives to promote the role of School Governors and encourage more volunteers to come forward. This includes contacting employers and institutions in the County and developing a new application form that aims to draw out the talent of prospective governors to help schools make the right choice of candidate. Officers will also work to strengthen the capacity and strategic effectiveness of school governors and to develop recruitment practices and professional development to secure a sustainable, strong pool of governors across Lancashire.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Please see the response above.*

- 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.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Governor training for 2020-21 has been reviewed with an increasing amount of virtual training and meetings scheduled following a highly successful series of Zoom meetings in the summer term which enabled over 350 governors to engage in briefing and question and answer sessions.*

- d) A review of the mechanism for school governors to contribute to full governing body meeting agendas where the county council provide this service.

Response: *I support this recommendation. Any governor is entitled to bring items to a meeting providing that they contact the clerk and Headteacher in advance of the meeting. At the end of meetings, they can also ask that specific consideration of a matter of concern is addressed at a future meeting. A review of the agenda setting process is underway will ensure that this process is both timely and topical with additional training developed to support the clerking service.*