

MEETING:	General Overview and Scrutiny Committee
MEETING DATE:	10 March 2015
TITLE OF REPORT:	School examination performance
REPORT BY:	Head of learning and achievement

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To consider school performance for summer 2014 and the effectiveness of the school improvement partnership strategy and framework approved by the Cabinet Member for Young People and Children's Wellbeing to improve performance for Herefordshire's children and young people.

Recommendation(s)

That the committee:

- (a) considers school performance; and**
- (b) comments on how the effectiveness of the school improvement framework and strategy can be enhanced to improve outcomes for children and young people in Herefordshire.**

Alternative options

1. Alternative options are not listed as it is for General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to decide what options they might wish to pursue in their scrutiny role in relation to school performance.

Reasons for recommendations

2. To enable General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to exercise its important scrutiny function in relation to pupil and school performance in Herefordshire. It is also an opportunity for General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the approach to school improvement developed with schools, the Diocese of Hereford and Archdiocese of Cardiff.

Key considerations

3. Effective school improvement drives school performance, along with the developmental and educational outcomes for children. Effective education reduces costs to support services at all levels and helps develop strong communities and economies.
4. Herefordshire Council recognises accountability for the overall outcomes for children and young people, sufficiency and the quality of education. The council respects the autonomy of schools and recognises that all schools, even those supported by intervention, are responsible for their own improvement. The council continues to work in partnership with other organisations including school leaders, governors, staff and the Diocese and Archdiocese of Cardiff on a model of school improvement which encourages schools to seek continuous improvement by sharing knowledge and pooling expertise.
5. The council's education strategy and framework makes clear the council's aim that Herefordshire's educational outcomes are in the top quartile by 2016/17 and rank in the top three of its statistical neighbours.
6. Performance headlines are set out below and Members will receive a more detailed update in the presentation that will accompany this item
 - 87.6% of Herefordshire children are taught in primary schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding; 83% of pupils in the secondary phase are in good or outstanding schools; over 90% of early years' group settings have been judged as good or outstanding; 89% of childminders inspected are good or outstanding.
 - The percentage of 5 year old children reaching a good level of development at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2014 was in line with the national average. Girls outperformed boys by a considerable margin; boys' writing is a key area for improvement. In Herefordshire, children eligible for free school meals achieved less well than their peers with 34% achieving a good level of development compared to 45% nationally. Children identified as having English as an additional language also achieved less well than the same group nationally. Local authority officers are working with early years' settings to identify strategies which will support disadvantaged children when the early years' pupil premium additional funding is introduced in April 2015.

- At key stage one, the proportion of children reaching expected levels of attainment in 2014 (level 2c+) in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of 7 was broadly in line with national average.
 - Over the past three years, the percentage of children attaining a level 4+ by the end of the primary phase has demonstrated year on year improvement. Nevertheless, in 2014, 76% of Herefordshire children attained a level 4 or better overall in reading, mathematics and writing compared to a national average of 78%. Pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils with English as an additional language achieved less well than the same groups nationally.
 - Overall Herefordshire secondary schools and academies performed well in 2014. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, was 57%, slightly above the national average of 56%. Both boys and girls outperformed their peers nationally with girls achieving exceptionally well. The percentage of pupils making the progress expected between KS2 and KS4 in English rose significantly from 65% in 2014 to 71.2%; the percentage of pupils making the progress expected in maths also increased on the previous year's figure. Herefordshire schools entered a higher percentage of pupils for the English Baccalaureate than other schools nationally and the percentage of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate was also high at 27.1% compared to the national average of 24.0%.
 - There were 20 Herefordshire looked after children in the cohort for GCSEs in 2014. Eighteen left school with at least one qualification and 4 achieved the equivalent of 5 GCSEs grade C and above. No looked after children achieved 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths. All of these young people were in education, training or employment in September 2014.
 - At A-levels 96% of students achieved 2 or more passes at A*-E in 2014 compared to the national figure of 91.8%. The percentage of students achieving 3A*-A grades was higher than national. The number of young people not in education, employment or training has decreased from 6.4% in 2013 to 5.7% in 2014. A particular focus in Herefordshire has been the reduction in the number of young people recorded as Not Known. In 2012 this was 10.1%. In 2013 the figure was 4.9% and provisional data for 2014 shows a further reduction to just 4.2%. During this period many other local authorities with a small percentage of NEET young people have seen increased numbers of Not Known. In the West Midlands region the percentage of Not Known was 2012 16.3%, 2013 15.0% and 2014 12.2%.
7. As indicated in the 2010 white paper, 'The importance of teaching', Herefordshire Council champions excellence in education and has responsibility for establishing strong working relationships with educational leaders from all sectors; this includes early years' settings.
8. The local authority is responsible for early intervention where the performance of maintained schools is declining and takes swift action when failure occurs. In the case of academies and free schools, Herefordshire Council is working closely with the Regional Commissioner for academies, the Department for Education and the Education Funding Agency to ensure excellent outcomes for all learners.

9. The Herefordshire School Improvement Group which comprises head teachers and National and Local Leaders of Education is facilitated by Herefordshire Council. A core function of this group includes developing and implementing a risk assessment approach to the monitoring of schools which supports schools in their own self-evaluation and identifies where the local authority needs to intervene to secure rapid improvement. The group has also agreed a data sharing protocol which enables the identification of issues for individual schools and settings or county-wide.
10. The recent successful application by Marlbrook primary school to attain teaching schools status was supported by the council. Herefordshire Council is also an equal partner in Herefordshire Teaching Schools Alliance which enables schools to access best practice and school-to-school support.
11. There are a number of statutory duties undertaken by Herefordshire Council which include the moderation of teacher assessment in the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Local authority officers support the delivery of religious education through SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). Herefordshire Council also has an overarching responsibility for pupils who have, or may have, special educational needs. The council is responsible for the safeguarding of children.
12. Herefordshire Council works with a range of stakeholders to bid for additional funding from national agencies such as the National College. A recent bid secured £45k to support the small number of schools identified as 'requiring improvement'. Local authority officers support the training and development needs of professionals in early years' settings, including childminders.
13. The local authority also performs a research and development role. Current initiatives include a project with the University of Worcester which aims to stretch and challenge high performing schools. The local authority has an ongoing project examining outcomes of vulnerable groups, including pupils eligible for the pupil premium.

Community impact

14. Pupil performance is important because it enables young people to successfully access employment or higher education and measures progress relative to their starting points.
15. The strategy considers performance data at both micro and macro level, including vulnerable groups, and looks at performance over time. This informs the work of the strategy and framework, allowing work to be appropriately targeted.

Equality and human rights

16. The development and implementation has and will pay due regard to our public sector equality duty to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

and the focus on particular vulnerable groups will explicitly address this duty.

Financial implications

17. There are no specific financial implications as Governor support services are provided by surrounding local authorities or private/not for profit organisations, rather than the local authority itself. The council has had a role in brokering this support and still has some statutory duties to fulfil in relation to governors.

Legal implications

18. Consideration of this report falls within the definition of responsibility delegated to the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in Part 3 paragraph 3.5.2.1.n of the Council's Constitution.
19. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report, however Section 13A of the Education Act 1996 places a legal duty on the council to promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential in relation to all its education functions and specifically to ensure that all its education functions are (so far as they are capable of being so exercised) exercised by the authority with a view to:
 - (a) promoting high standards;
 - (b) ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and training; and
 - (c) promoting the fulfilment of learning potential by every person under the age of 20 (and persons aged 20 or over and for whom an EHC plan is maintained).
20. The duty in section 13A applies to community schools, but not to academies. While the council has no direct responsibility for academies, there is an expectation that there will be a relationship whereby the local authority is aware of standards and in a position to raise concerns directly with the school, or with Ofsted, if there is not a satisfactory response.

Risk management

21. The risks to the council are that the model does not deliver the strategic objectives, given that it is a new, untested way of working with considerably less resources available from the local authority than ever before. This will be mitigated through the development of a strong, active Herefordshire School Improvement Partnership Group, by wider engagement with governors through the Herefordshire Governors' Association which has recently been reinvigorated, and through the clear remit of activity for the new school improvement service. Influencing the use of the dedicated schools grant by schools to address improvement activities would further mitigate the risk.
22. The effectiveness of the local authority arrangements will be reviewed through performance monitoring. Ofsted may also inspect the local authority, given the performance of some vulnerable groups, particularly those eligible for free school meals in relation to overall progress, and progress in relation to their peers.

23. There are risks that some schools do not engage with, or value the new approach and still look for a paternalistic model of local authority support. Clear communications are planned, alongside direct work between schools to open up to all to address this risk

Consultees

24. Herefordshire schools and Herefordshire governors.

Appendices

25. None identified.

Background papers

26. None identified.