

MEETING:	General overview and scrutiny committee
MEETING DATE:	8 March 2016
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

Countywide

Purpose

To consider school performance for summer 2015 and the effectiveness of the Herefordshire school improvement partnership strategy and framework in improving outcomes for Herefordshire's children and young people.

Recommendation(s)

That the committee:

- (a) considers school performance; and**
- (b) makes recommendations to cabinet on how the effectiveness of the school improvement framework and strategy could be enhanced.**

Alternative options

1. Alternative options are not listed as it is for the committee to decide what actions it wishes to undertake within its scrutiny role.

Reasons for recommendations

2. To enable the committee to scrutinise pupil and school performance in Herefordshire as assessed in 2015.

Key considerations

3. Effective school improvement is a key factor in school performance, supporting improvement in the developmental and educational outcomes for children.
4. The council acts as a champion 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 be a key organisation in school improvement, in partnership with other organisations including school leaders, governors, staff, the Diocese of Hereford and the Archdiocese of Cardiff, and the regional schools commissioner. It is an increasingly complex world of education accountability and support.
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. The council's approach to school improvement is subject to Ofsted inspection, which will examine the role of the council in relation to pupil outcomes in maintained schools, academies and free schools.
7. Performance headlines are set out below and further detail is available in the presentation at appendix 1
 - In January 2016 88% 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 92% of early years' group settings have been judged as good or outstanding; 97% of childminders inspected are good or outstanding.
 - The percentage of five year old children reaching a good level of development at the end of early years foundation stage (EYFS) in 2015 was broadly in line with the national average. Girls again outperformed boys. The attainment gap between children eligible for free school meals and their classmates remained fairly static. A good level of development was achieved by 40% of children eligible for free school meals, which is an improvement on the previous two years.
 - In year one phonics testing, the performance of Herefordshire children improved at a faster rate than nationally. However, outcomes remain below that found nationally. In order to address this gap, the council is working in collaboration with Marlbrook teaching school to access best practice from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council where performance in phonics is traditionally strong.

- At key stage (KS) 1 , the proportion of children reaching expected levels of attainment in 2015 (level 2c+) in reading, writing and mathematics at age 7 was broadly in line with the national average. However, not enough pupils are attaining the highest levels (level 2a+). The attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals was low.
 - In a recent communication, the improvement in results achieved by Herefordshire primary schools at the end of year six was recognised by Ofsted. At KS2 pupils' performance improved markedly on previous years. The percentage of children attaining a level 4+ by the end of the primary phase in reading, mathematics and writing is now in line with the national average. Similarly, the percentage of pupils achieving the highest levels (L5+) compares favourably with that found nationally for the first time. The levels of progress made by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics were above national average.
 - Herefordshire secondary schools and academies continued to perform above the national average in 2015. The percentage of pupils achieving five plus GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, was 57.5%. This is a marginal decrease, however, compared to last year's figure. In mathematics the percentage of pupils making the progress expected between KS2 and KS4 was 73.1%; this is well above the national figure of 68.2%. In English 74.9% of pupils made the progress expected; this is also higher than the national figure of 72.5%. A higher percentage of pupils in Herefordshire achieved the English baccalaureate (25%) than in other schools nationally (24%).
 - There were 18 Herefordshire looked after children in the cohort for GCSEs in 2015. Of these young people, 16.7% left school having achieved the equivalent of five GCSE passes at grades A*- C, including English and mathematics; this is higher than last year's national average of 14.2%. All of these young people were in education, training or employment in September 2015.
 - Increased numbers of students in maintained secondary schools and academies progressed to level 3 qualifications in 2015. Overall, the county ranks 19 out of 150 councils for the proportion of students (including those in colleges) gaining three A*-A grades or better at A-level, and 15 for the proportion of students attaining AAB grades. The pass rate (grades A*-E) at key stage five in Herefordshire was 99.4%, exceeding the national average of 98.1%. Not enough students, however, achieve at least two substantial Level 3 qualifications.
 - The number of young people not in education, employment or training has decreased to 4.1% in 2015 which is better than the national average of 4.5%. The reduction in the number of young people recorded as not known (currently 157 young people) continues to be a particular focus. Various initiatives, such as recruiting both a dedicated Not in education, employment or training (NEET) tracking and research officer and a link worker from a local training provider (Hoople), have been particularly successful in referring young people more accurately to the support that may move them into education, employment or training. A focused project on the year 11 cohort of students who left specialist provision has had a positive impact for relatively low cost.
8. Strong leadership and management are essential to ensuring excellent outcomes for learners. The council has worked in partnership with the regional schools commissioner, the Department for Education and the Education Funding Agency to

secure good outcomes for students in academies. Over the past year there have been some academies that have not performed well in terms of Ofsted inspections and there have also been some issues in relation to leadership and governance which the council has proactively taken up with the regional schools commissioner's office. It has been important to maintain an interest and insight into the issues that academies face in Herefordshire to promote effective high quality education. Currently the government is considering legislative changes to strengthen the role of the regional schools commissioner and reduce the role of the local authority. Herefordshire will need to take an active part in any national consultation and also determine what would be effective arrangements for the Herefordshire context. This will include the potential push for academies to become part of multi academy trusts and the potential for a lack of local knowledge and expertise in the education system to support schools. In maintained schools the council is responsible for early intervention and swift action when a decline in performance occurs and over the past year has used its powers to issue financial notices of concern and also warning notices to a small number of schools to prompt concerted action to improve financial planning and leadership and management.

9. The council is committed to developing leadership at all levels. Leading headteachers, designated as national leaders in education, work in close collaboration with school improvement officers to improve the quality of leadership in both the primary and secondary phases. Joint training sessions delivered by council officers, sometimes with HMI Ofsted, have enhanced local approaches to particular aspects of school improvement. In Herefordshire there are seven national leaders in education and two national leaders in governance.
10. Developing a self-sufficient infrastructure where school-to-school support is the main driver of school improvement is central to the council's vision for raising standards across the county. In partnership with Wigmore teaching school, the council is involved in accrediting specialist leaders in education. These are leaders who have the knowledge and skills to drive standards in subject areas in their own and other schools. The council has also recently supported the applications of a local primary school and two leading headteachers for teaching school and national leader in education status.
11. Recent projects to improve the quality of leadership at governing body level have been undertaken by the council in collaboration with an external provider and national leaders in governance (NLGs). This partnership working arrangement aims to enable governors across Herefordshire to have the necessary information and training to perform their volunteer role; develop a group of experienced governors based in the county with the skills and training to mentor and support other governors in Herefordshire; create a sustainable model of support that thrives beyond 2016. Governor vacancies are currently running at around 10%; there is a need for an ongoing supply of good governors.
12. There are a number of statutory duties undertaken by the council which include the moderation of outcomes in the early years. This year the moderation of teacher assessment in KS1 and KS2 will be undertaken by Marlbrook teaching school on behalf of the council. Council officers support the delivery of religious education through SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education).

Community impact

13. Pupil performance is important because it enables young people to successfully access employment or higher education and measures progress relative to their starting points.
14. The council's corporate plan has as a priority keeping children safe and giving them a great start in life. Within this plan sits the council's approach to education and its education strategy which 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 Herefordshire's school improvement partnership and framework, allowing work to be appropriately targeted. Herefordshire's children and young people's plan contains specific work to enhance children's life chances and give them a great start in life and also provides a focus to develop family support which can improve a child's educational development as well.

Equality and human rights

15. The focus on the gaps in achievement between vulnerable groups and their peers has and continues to be a key issue for Herefordshire. A number of activities have taken place within individual schools, between schools and with assistance from the council. There has been some examples of good practice and improvement which has narrowed the gap. However, further work is required and this is taking place as part of Herefordshire's approach to school improvement.
16. Herefordshire has struggled over a number of years to narrow the gap between vulnerable pupils and their peers. The council has an ongoing project examining outcomes of vulnerable groups, including pupils eligible for the pupil premium, and coordinating action. Over the past year schools have taken part in peer to peer support, triad work with the support of Ofsted HMI and the council, and investigative work into what is effective in other council areas. This includes examining performance for pupils with English as an additional language and pupils from a gypsy, roma or traveller heritage. Over the past two years there has been evidence of improvement and some schools have received letters of commendation from the secretary of state. However, overall the gaps remain too wide and this academic year the council has worked with the Herefordshire school improvement partnership to highlight school performance over a three year trend and to focus work with schools where this gap has been particularly prevalent.

Financial implications

17. There are no specific financial implications contained in this report
18. The performance outlined in this report is the result of the dedicated schools grant of £73m. The budget allocated to school improvement officers resource is £139k.

Legal implications

19. 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.

20. 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 council 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 education, health and care (EHC) plan is maintained).
21. 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 council 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

22. The risks to the council are that the model does not deliver the strategic objectives of council and school improvement partnership. This is being mitigated through the active Herefordshire school improvement partnership group, continuing to develop the engagement with governors and by creating strong links with the regional school commissioner's office.
23. The effectiveness of the council's arrangements will be reviewed through performance monitoring, through Herefordshire's school improvement partnership and strategic education board. The committee also play an important role in reviewing effectiveness. Ofsted may also inspect the council, 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.

Consultees

24. None

Appendices

Appendix 1: presentation.

Background papers

None identified.