Central Bedfordshire Council

CHILDRENS SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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Refresh of the Partnership Vision for Education

Report of Cllr Steve Dixon Executive Member for Education and Skills, (steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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Purpose of this report

1. The report sets out the work undertaken to refresh the Partnership Vision for Education, the development of the school clusters and the long, medium and short term priorities that have emerged from the schools clusters. It provides an opportunity to feed back on the refreshed Partnership Vision For Education which has been co-constructed with schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the work completed to refresh the Partnership Vision For Education with schools and support the refreshed Vision and the actions identified for its delivery.

Background

1. Central Bedfordshire Council's Executive approved the Partnership Vision for Education on 4 August 2015 and it was launched with schools in September 2015. The Vision was co-constructed with schools and partners and took account of feedback received.

2. The Vision consisted of 6 key elements which set out key actions for the Council and partners. These were progressed through workstreams which reported on a half termly basis to the Partnership Vision For Education Board.
    - School Leadership.

- Achieving results in the top quartile in key stage tests, including GCSEs and A Levels.
- School readiness.
- Improving health outcomes to support improving education outcomes.
- Young people have the skills to be work ready.
- Commission new school places from good or outstanding providers to serve growing communities.

3. School were asked to sign a Pledge committing to delivering the Vision. 76 schools/partners responded, although a significant number of schools who had not signed the Pledge were very engaged in delivering the Vision.

Peer Review

4. Central Bedfordshire commissioned a Peer Review of Arrangements for School Improvement on 7/8March 2016 which was carried out by colleagues from school improvement services in the Eastern Region.

5. The peer review team were asked to look into how engaged schools were in the 5 Year Vision, and how well they understood their joint roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

6. The strengths identified by the Peer Review were:
    a. Heads value their ongoing relationship with the Local Authority
    b. Heads value Central Essentials and Governors Essentials
    c. The initial development of the Teaching Schools has been closely supported by the LA to good effect
    d. There are some good examples of QA arrangements for all commissioned work
    e. All schools have access to and are engaged with the Teaching Schools in some form
    f. Schools understand the LA categorisation system for school support
    g. Governance Reviews and governor monitoring are used proactively to support improved leadership
    h. There are some good examples emerging of schools working collaboratively

7. In response to the recommendations actions have been taken to:
    a. Refresh the Partnership Vision ensuring work reflects key priorities for improvement in pupil achievement, with clear focus and urgency around improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and across Key Stage 2.
    b. Co-construct a document that sets out Central Bedfordshire's school led school improvement strategy that defines all partners' roles. This has been approved by the Partnership Vision For Education Board and circulated to schools via Central Essentials.

c. Review and amend the performance reports for schools and school clusters. These were amended for September 2016 and are being further amended following feedback at the cluster meetings.
d. Continue to challenge all schools to improve outcomes. This has been and will continue to be done through the cluster meetings. A one day scoping audit has also been developed to support the local authority and schools to explore performance in more detail and identify strengths and areas for improvement that may not generally be uncovered through data monitoring processes.
e. Develop a plan in partnership with schools to accelerate improvement at Key Stage 2, drawing on best practice in primary, middle and lower schools. A secondary readiness leaflet similar to the one produced for school readiness has been co-produced with schools setting out what pupils will need to be able to do to be secondary ready and examples of things they can do to help with this. There is a conference on 1 December focussing on raising attainment at key Stage 2 which has been co developed with key schools and which will share best practice.
f. Commission and train additional moderators and develop a more systematic model of cross phase moderation across the LA. This has been completed and is being implemented this year.

8. At the Partnership Vision For Education Board Meeting on 9 May 2016 the Board considered the Peer Review report and made the following recommendations regarding the refresh of the Partnership Vision For Education
   i. Remove the elements that are 'Business as usual' and make it slimmer and sharper.
   j. Focus on the key priorities around actions that will lead to improving outcomes, including focus on recruitment and retention.
   k. Some working groups are proving effective and need to continue, but not necessarily as a workstream of the delivery plan of the Vision. These groups could provide updates to the Board and to schools.

Heads and Governors Meetings

9. A meeting was held with Heads and Governors on 13 June 2016 with a key agenda item being the refresh of the Partnership Vision for Education.

10. At the meeting the changing national and local context was clarified, including demographic growth in Central Bedfordshire, the status of the Education Bill, school funding, including Education Services Grant and the consultation process on the Dedicated Schools Grant, and

the potential impact of this. The threats and opportunities were set out and schools were asked to engage with us and each other to take the opportunity to develop a collaborative local system that supported our collective ambition to secure the best outcomes for children.

11. We set out our ambition to develop the conversations between the Local Authority, headteachers, Chairs of Governors and Academy sponsors within the context of building on the success to date of school to school support and an understanding that schools are at the heart of the community.

12. The Peer Review findings were shared with schools. Some schools felt that the report reflected the views of a few schools, but not of all schools.

13. Schools were asked to consider the following questions in refreshing the Partnership Vision for Education:
    - What are the 3 key actions that will drive achieving the vision?
    - What data reports would schools find useful in supporting conversations in schools and across schools to improve outcomes?
    - What are you currently doing that is having an impact on improving outcomes for children and young people in your locality?

14. Key actions that were identified included:
    - Reviewing provision for disadvantaged pupils and the impact of this, including engagement of appropriate professionals to support children and at Early Help and Team Around Child meetings.
    - Broader awareness of the successes of disadvantaged pupils in other subject areas and how that could be used to support further improvement in outcomes.
    - Identifying best practice that has real impact on pupil outcomes.
    - More joined up approaches/collaboration/joint accountability (in systems, curriculum, pedagogy and moderation to ensure assessment data is robust and accurate across phases and key stages regardless of site). Build and sustain an atmosphere of trust between schools.
    - Invest more resources by sharing best teachers in schools with weaker staffing.
    - More honest discussions between schools focussed on pupil outcomes.
    - Sharing best practice between schools and the learning from collaboration projects.
    - Addressing emotional wellbeing issues in children so they are ‘ready’ to learn.
    - Involve all stakeholders, including parents and staff.
    - Review of support services for children.

- Look at best practice outside Central Bedfordshire and coordinate action based research nationally through Teaching Schools.
- Recruitment and retention.

15. Additional data suggested by schools was:
    - Provide KS2 outcomes to lower schools of their children's performance at end of Key Stage assessment.
    - Provide KS4 outcomes to middle and primary schools for their pupils.
    - Provide data that enable comparisons between outcomes of schools with a similar demographic.
    - Provide tracking data for every year group – possibly termly tracking data submitted by schools.
    - Further develop locality reports based on pyramids/catchments.
    - School readiness check at pre-school.
    - Consider how matched and unmatched data could be reported/captured.
    - Consider data on more able pupils who are also represented in other groups, e.g. disadvantage.

16. A number of examples of effective practice were shared.

Partnership Vision for Education Board – 4 July 2016 and 19 September 2016

17. At the Board meeting on 4 July 2016 Board members reflected on the feedback from the Heads and Governors and came to the following conclusions.

- Recruitment & retention reportedly remains an issue.
- There is a culture across some schools of apportioning blame for poor outcomes and a positive culture needs to be encouraged.
- Recent political events could result in changes to White Paper proposals, so it is important to keep the focus on improving outcomes for children regardless of political change.
- Guidance differs on transitions which should be considered in the autumn term locality meetings.
- It would be helpful to collate information on services available to schools.
- Capacity needs to be developed across schools to support delivery of school to school support. Schools that do not normally put themselves forward need to be encouraged to do so.
- Lots of positive feedback was received relating to collaborative working, and this success needs to be captured and built on.

18. The Board was asked to think about further mechanisms to identify and share best practice.

19. At the Board meeting on 19 September 2016 the Board reflected on the workshops held over the summer and the planned agendas for the cluster meetings.

20. The Board agreed that networking is very important for head teachers, especially those new to post. The Board thought cluster meetings should help heads feel less isolated and could provide an infrastructure for collaboration leading to improved outcomes. Schools need to be actively involved in the process of collaboration.

21. The Board agreed that the timing of cluster meetings needed to be considered alongside the Director's meetings with heads and governors. It was agreed that given the cluster meetings were looking at data and identifying local priorities, a separate meeting was not necessary in the autumn term. Agendas for meetings in the spring and summer term would be agreed by the Board. It was agreed that a summer meeting could bring together the outcomes of the work of the clusters and help redefine priorities for the following year.

22. A schedule of all cluster meetings, head and governor meetings across the year would be provided in Central Essentials once dates were agreed and provided by cluster leads.

23. A discussion was held on the recruitment data census returns which do not support feedback that recruitment is a big issue. It was agreed that further guidance would be sent to schools to complete the national census as it was not clear that schools filled it in accurately.

24. It was felt that the main issue regarding recruitment was not inability to recruit, but that shortages of teachers meant that there was less competition for posts which was impacting on the quality of teachers filling vacancies.

25. Some schools shared that they were succession planning through for example supporting teacher training for Higher Level Teaching Assistants.

26. It was agreed that recruitment challenges would be tested at the cluster meetings, and that a short survey would then be developed to identify what schools were doing to recruit and retain good staff, and what and where the specific issues were. The survey was agreed at the 14 November Partnership Vision for Education Board.

Planning workshops for the cluster meetings

27. During August and September meetings were held with a group of volunteer heads facilitated by iMPOWER to plan the cluster meetings, drawing on the work already completed.

28. The workshops helped to co-design the cluster meeting agendas, what should be in the cluster presentation pack for these meetings, and some draft terms of reference for clusters to consider.

29. The workshops sought to establish what they as representative heads believed made effective collaboration, what the barriers to collaboration were and what the 'hooks' might be to encourage heads and governors to become involved.

30. The group agreed the rationale for locality clusters that should be discussed with clusters.

- All schools and the local authority stand to gain from working collaboratively in locality clusters.
- We want to build on the successful collaboration that has already been established and do not wish to duplicate what is working well.
- Clusters would be led by schools but the council could support schools to develop, agree and deliver on their agreed priorities.
- The Local Authority's role is to champion children and to ensure that children and young people are achieving great outcomes.
- Through collaboration we can deliver improved outcomes for children and young people in Central Bedfordshire and deliver our Partnership Vision for Education.

31. The workshops developed a summary of the purpose of cluster working to be discussed, amended and agreed at the cluster meetings.

A great 0-19 learning journey for every child

- Enabling and ensuring great teaching for all of our children.
- Raising the aspirations of the whole education community
- Creating and supporting a culture of success across the whole education community.
- Improving the attainment and progression of all of our children.
- Facilitating the social mobility of vulnerable children.

32. Potential benefits for discussion at the cluster meetings were agreed.

- A forum for developing, agreeing and delivering shared priorities across the 0-19 journey of the child within geographical areas.
- A forum for open challenge and support.
- A place to share and develop innovative and creative ideas which improve outcomes for children and young people.
- A mechanism through which to develop leaders at all levels, share skills, resources and purchasing power.
- An effective support network for new headteachers.
- A forum for understanding locality data.

33. Worskshop attendees were keen that as a result of cluster meetings, talking led to action and tangible impact.

Interviews and surveys

34. Telephone interviews were carried out iMPOWER with 14 heads from across Central Bedfordshire and representing different schools phases.

35. 100% of heads interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that all schools have something to gain from collaborating with other schools and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that all schools have something to contribute towards collaboration.

36. 91% of heads interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that sharing resources can help schools to improve and address challenges.

37. 100% of heads interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that it is important even for the most high-achieving schools to keep looking at ways they could improve and learn from others.

38. When asked about the impact of collaboration on improving outcomes, heads interviewed had differing n experiences with 66% saying that collaboration happened a bit or not at all.

39. When faced with challenges, the majority of heads will look for support from other schools, while some would approach system leaders.

40. Only 50 % of heads interviewed indicated that current collaboration is effective.

41. Interviewed heads reported key reasons for high and effective collaboration as:

- Established structures and leadership.
- Established regular meetings.
- Opportunity to share experience and moderate.
- Mutually supportive.
- Useful to check in and share practice.
- Wide engagement.

42. Interviewed heads reported key reasons for no or low collaboration or ineffective collaboration as:
    - Lack of structure, drive, purpose or requirement to collaborate.
    - Too busy/not enough capacity.
    - Feeling of isolation or not being actively involved.

- Lack of leadership and central coordination.
- Differences in practice and ethos.
- Lack of practical impact and improvement.
- Lack of strategic coherence.
- Need to improve practice more.
- Need to involve more people.
- Not regular or structured enough.

43. The majority of heads interviewed indicated that meetings should be half termly and should have a clear agenda, should not be exclusive or competitive, and had representation form a decent number of schools.

44. Interviewed heads were asked what should their cluster do or discuss that would make engagement worthwhile, and what would be the benefits. Consistent responses were:

- Improve standards at Key Stage 2.
- Raising aspirations.
- Providing moderation.
- Be honest and open
- Time will be freed up.
- Schools will work together and not in isolation.

45. The views of Governors and Trustees were sought via a survey. 409 responses were received.

46. 97% of governors/trustees who responded agreed or strongly agreed that sharing skills and resources can help schools to improve and address challenges.

47. 94% of governors/trustees who responded agreed or strongly agreed that all schools have something to contribute towards collaboration, and 97 % thought that all schools have something gain from collaboration.

48. 67% of governors/trustees who responded agreed or strongly agreed that schools could collaborate more across Central Bedfordshire, and 69% agreed or strongly agreed that schools could collaborate more with local schools in their area.

49. 72% of governors/trustees who responded felt they already collaborated well with local schools in their area.

50. Top 5 areas that could be positively impacted by cluster working identified by governors/trustees are:

- Continuing professional development (CPD) and general staff training and support.

- Attainment.
- Attainment of vulnerable children.
- SEND
- Staff recruitment and retention.

51. The views of parents and carers were sought via a survey. 1,309 responses were received.

52. 94% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that good and outstanding schools can still learn from other schools.

53. 92% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that good and outstanding schools should work with other schools to share their skills and knowledge.

54. 97% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that schools should work together to learn from each other.

55. 91% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that all schools should make sure that children are prepared for the knowledge and skills that they will need before they transition between schools.

56. 95% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that schools should work together to help children and they move between schools.

57. 72% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that their child's teachers brought out the best in them, and 73% agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school supported them to aim high, which would suggest that around 25% are not yet confident in this .

58. 90% of parents and carers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that the education their child receives offers them a great opportunity to get on in life.

Cluster meetings

59. Meetings were held in 7 localities serving the agreed cluster groups of schools. These were:

a. Harlington Area Schools Trust – 20 September 2016
b. Leighton Buzzard, Linslade and Woburn Sands – 28 September 2016.
c. Houghton Regis – 3 October 2016.
d. Sandy, Biggleswade – 4 October 2016.
e. Stotfold, Shefford and Arlesey – 11 October 2016.
f. Dunstable – 12 October 2016.
g. Ampthill, Flitwick and Cranfield – 20 October 2016

60. Representatives from 101 schools attended and many schools had more than one representative. Some special schools attended more than one cluster meeting as they admit children from a broader area.

61. The HAST meeting was attended by representatives from all schools.

62. 18 out of 28 schools in the Leighton Buzzard/Linslade/Woburn Sands cluster were represented.

63. 10 out of 14 schools in the Houghton Regis cluster were represented, although 2 schools identified for this cluster attended the Dunstable cluster as they felt that this was more appropriate for them.

64. 14 out of 22 schools in the Stotfold/Shefford cluster were represented.

65. 16 out of 21 school in the Dunstable cluster were represented, with apologies received from one who was unable to attend

66. 22 out of 24 schools in the Sandy/Biggleswade cluster were represented, although 1 head retires this term and the other head is supportive of the work but could not attend.

67. 12 out of 14 schools in the Ampthill/Flitwick cluster were represented, with apologies received from 1 school.

68. A letter has been written to all of those schools who did not sign in / attend to identify their reasons for not attending and encourage future engagement.

69. At each cluster meeting attendees were asked whether the outputs from the workshops and the interviews and surveys resonated with them. There was broad agreement to the purpose and rationale for cluster working, and the need for tangible impact.

70. The 3 consistent long term priorities (5 – 10 years) that came through all of the cluster meetings and which are consistent with those that came from the heads and governors meeting in June 2016 are:

- Improving attainment with each cluster aiming to improve outcomes for their children year on year.
- Improving children's resilience.
- Improving transitions through all stages (into school, within school, between schools and into further learning and the workplace)

71. The short to medium term priorities (6 – 12 months) which were consistent across the clusters are:

- Share best practice within and across clusters.
- Raise aspirations and share successes.

- Strengthen leadership.
- Improve progress and outcomes.
- Improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.
- Improve child and family resilience.
- Improve the quality and consistency of assessments and moderation.
- Develop a strategy to support staff recruitment and retention of quality teachers and leaders.
- Identify children's needs early and improve early help and intervention.
- Improve working with local partners.
- Develop a directory of quality assured best practice, building on the Open Schools East network.

72. These have been captured in a refreshed Partnership Vision for Education which is attached at Appendix 1.

Council Priorities

73. This work supports the following Council priorities

- Improving education and skills
- Creating stronger communities

Corporate Implications

74. All partners that impact on education outcomes for children are needed to support delivery of the vision.

Legal Implications

75. None

Financial and Risk Implications

76. There is a risk of loss of Education Services Grant (due to go in September 2017) reducing capacity in the Local Authority to support the cluster work.

77. A Strategic School Improvement Fund was announced by the Government on 1 December 2016 as new money to build school-led capacity. It will be available to academies and maintained schools most in need of support. Schools will be able to apply to the fund either alone, or as a group of schools, with the support of a Teaching School a National Leader of Education (NLE), The LA or the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), to receive additional funding to support school improvement provision. RSCs, Teaching Schools and LAs will be involved in encouraging and

supporting bids. This could provide an opportunity for our school clusters to apply for additional resource to deliver their plans.

78. There may be some resource implications for the Council and schools arising from the outcomes of the survey on teacher recruitment to support delivery of a strategy to recruit the best teachers and leaders to Central Bedfordshire. The outcome of the survey will be reported to a future meeting.

Equalities Implications

79. Public Authorities must ensure that decisions are made in a way which minimises unfairness, and without a disproportionately negative effect on people from different ethnic groups, disabled people, women and men. It is important that Councillors are aware of this duty before they take a decision.

80. When decisions are made, decision makers must have the relevant data, including the results of equality impact assessment, and of consultation and involvement, to ensure they reach an informed decision.

81. The refreshed Partnership Vision For Education supports the work to narrow the gap between disadvantage pupils and their peers and improve outcomes for all pupils.

Implications for Work Programming

82. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider future reports on the individual cluster action plans and progress being made against the actions.

Conclusion and next Steps

83. The cluster meetings and the workshops, surveys and interviews have all demonstrated the strong support from for working collaboratively within a framework that ensures impact on children's outcomes.

84. There is strong support for working in school clusters to support each other in ensuring that children have a great education journey from 0-19.

85. Dates for future cluster meetings have been or are being set and these will be shared with all clusters.

86. All clusters have agreed to meet to pursue the goals as agreed in the meetings, although the mechanics of meetings will differ across localities.

87. It was proposed that Biggleswade and Sandy would continue to meet as separate clusters once a term, but to then come together for the second meeting each term.

88. It was proposed that Cranfield and Marston would continue to meet as a small cluster as the majority of their pupils crossed the border into Bedford Borough schools. They have identified a head to attend the Partnership Vision for Education Board.

89. The Local Authority will be a member of each cluster group and a senior school improvement officer from the Council will attend each cluster meeting to work with the cluster.

90. The Terms of Reference for the Partnership Vision for Education board will be reviewed to reflect the refreshed Partnership Vision for Education. Board membership has been revised, and there is now a representative from each cluster on the Board, enabling stronger partnership between the Board and clusters.

91. Following the cluster meetings it has been agreed to use the 1 March 2017 heads and Chairs meeting to update on the Children's Services Transformation programme and engage schools in discussions on the development of locality teams/services and how this can integrate with their cluster priorities and the delivery of the Partnership Vision for Education.

92. There will be a conference on 13 June 2017 to report back on the work of the clusters and the impact on improving outcomes, where best practice will be shared and celebrated.

Appendices

Appendix 1a and 1b: Refreshed Partnership Vision for Education.

Background Papers

93. None.