

TITLE **Education Update**

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny

WARD None Specific;

DIRECTOR Helen Watson, Interim Children’s Services Director

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To improve education outcomes for children and young people with increasing focus on vulnerable learners.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the content of this update report, specifically changes to statutory duties on attendance and those proposed in the government’s Education Green & White papers.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

1. School Attendance - Spring & Summer 2022

1.1: Current Performance of Wokingham Schools:

	31 Mar	7 Apr	28 Apr	5 May	12 May	19 May	26 May
All Pupils	90%	91%	95%	92%	95%	91%	93%
Children with EHCP	85%	86%	92%	89%	93%	91%	89%
Children with a Social Worker	85%	91%	92%	88%	88%	90%	86%
Children with FSM eligibility	88%	86%	92%	89%	88%	89%	89%

Attendance of pupils overall continues to be above national expectations. Attendance of pupils with an EHCP, social worker or eligible for Free School Meals compares positively with national and statistical neighbour performance but ensuring good attendance for the most vulnerable children remains a strategic priority for the borough.

1.2: New Statutory Duties for the Local Authority

The DfE has published new non-statutory guidance on improving school attendance that applies from September 2022. These strengthen the statutory duties of the local authority.

As a minimum, local authorities are expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools which need it most
- Have a school attendance support team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
 - Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area
 - Targeted support meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils
 - Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance
 - Legal intervention: take forward legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.
 - Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

The DfE expects the local authorities to provide as much of this as possible during the 2022 to 2023 academic year.

The guidance explains that LAs will need time to transition to meet these expectations, but expects LAs to have the school attendance support team in place no later than September 2023. This increase in statutory duties will have financial implications which are currently being assessed.

2. Update on Borough Education Partnership (BEP)

2.1: Background

Whilst there is much to be proud of with regard to Wokingham's education provision and the outcomes being achieved by children and young people, the education system is facing increasingly complex challenges that require whole system engagement and collaboration to manage and overcome.

With more schools becoming Academies within larger multi-academy trusts (MATs) the education system has become fractured. The government's White Paper, Opportunity for All (March 2022) sets out a clear expectation that school and trust leaders and local authorities need to work together as a cohesive whole. Strategic decisions need to be collectively shared, explored and owned, as decisions made to improve one part of the system have impact on other parts of the system.

The Borough Education Partnership provides the vehicle in Wokingham for school and trust leaders and the local authority to work in partnership. Its role is to drive whole

system educational vision and strategy to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

2.2: Terms of Reference

Terms of reference were reviewed in May 2022. The membership is currently comprised of 12 elected school leaders, the Lead Member for Children’s Services, the Director of Children’s Services & the Assistant Director for Education. The Partnership has nominated Heather Tomlinson as independent chair until 31 December 2022.

2.3: Education Partnership Work Programme

When the Borough Education Partnership was established in January 2022 it identified an initial work programme focused on:

- (a) Sufficiency of mainstream school places to meet the rise in demand
- (b) Admissions and Fair Access systems, process and protocols
- (c) Sufficiency and quality of SEND provisions

The Borough Education Partnership has met 5 times between January & May 2022.

Agenda items discussed are as follows:

JANUARY	Terms of Reference, mission & partnership commitment Fair Access Policy & Protocol Sufficiency of School Places - Secondary Strategy 11-16
FEBRUARY	Sufficiency of School Places - Primary Strategy Sufficiency of School Places - Secondary Strategy Post 16
MARCH (2 meetings)	Sufficiency of School Places - Children currently without a school place, including Ukraine refugees Sufficiency of School Places - special educational needs Sufficiency of School Places - Secondary Strategy: Y7 Expansion & Post-16 expansion
MAY	Sufficiency of School Places - Children currently without a school place, including Ukraine refugees Sufficiency of School Places - Alternative Provision Sufficiency of School Places - Resource Based Provision Managed Moves

2.4: Initial Impact

The outcomes that have been achieved by the Borough Education Partnership to date include:

Secondary Strategy 11-16

Proposals were co-produced to secure 176 additional Y7 places at three schools to meet increased demand. These proposals were considered and approved by the council's Executive and included in the Medium Term Financial Plan. They are now being implemented for September 2022.

Fair Access Policy and Procedures

A new statutory Fair Access Policy and Procedure has been coproduced through the Partnership and system-wide support for these arrangements has been secured. These arrangements are now operational, enabling the borough's most vulnerable pupils to access a school place in line with the Admissions Code of Practice.

Secondary Strategy Post 16

Co-production through the Partnership resulted in post-16 proposals that would also secure additional 11-16 school places and increased SEND provision to meet demand. These proposals were considered and approved by the council's Executive and are now being implemented for September 2022 (11-16 expansion) and 2023 (Post-16 expansion).

2.5: Next Steps

Meetings in June and July will focus on:

- Sufficiency of Primary & Secondary school places to meet immediate demand, including response to Ukraine crisis
- Initiation of a School Places Working Group to prepare for increased demand 2023
- Managed Moves policy & protocol
- Sufficiency of School Places - Resource Based Provision
- Response to government White Paper
- Anti-Poverty Strategy

3. Update on Restructure of Learning, Achievement & Partnerships (LAP)

3.1: Introduction

This is to inform Overview & Scrutiny that a restructure of the Learning, Achievement & Partnerships (LAP) operating model is due to take place between June and December 2022.

The restructure is a priority action in the Children's Services Strategic Plan alongside the restructuring of other areas of Children's Services.

Phase 1 of the LAP restructure will take place between June and September 2022. Phase 2 will follow in autumn 2022.

Phase 1 focuses solely on the LAP management tier. Phase 2 will complete the restructure of LAP's overall operating model.

The main purpose of the restructure is to establish coherent, sustainable management arrangements that provide the strategic capacity required to manage increasing demand and financial risk in a changing educational and regulatory landscape.

For example, demand on school places and specialist provision and their costs are rising exponentially and will continue to do so. These pressures require a level of strategic leadership & management that does not currently exist in the LAP management structure.

Achieving savings is not the driver for restructure. However, restructure will deliver savings in line with the savings targets of the Children's Services strategic improvement plan and will provide the capacity to manage demand and budget pressures in the longer term.

Phase 1 will deliver savings of £75k through the deletion of one manager post (Lead Specialist Targeted Learning - currently vacant).

Phase 2 will deliver a further £125k of savings. The specifics of how this will be achieved have yet to be worked through in Phase 2 of the restructure (autumn term). However, it is likely that these will come from areas of the existing service where education core functions and statutory duties are subject to change as indicated in the government White Paper, Opportunity for All (March 22).

Feedback has been sought from LAP staff and stakeholders on the proposed aims of restructure. The aims and the feedback received are set out below.

Phase 1 proposals will be shared with LAP staff and stakeholders in June and affected managers will be formally consulted in July 2022.

Phase 2 proposals will be developed and shared in September 2022 and consultation with LAP staff will take place in October 2022.

3.2: The Existing LAP Management Structure

LEARNING, ACHIEVEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

PRINCIPAL
EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGIST

SCHOOL
ADMISSIONS &
TRANSPORT
MANAGER

LEAD
SPECIALIST
TARGETED
LEARNING

HEAD OF
SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

HEAD OF
VIRTUAL
SCHOOL

LEAD
SPECIALIST
SCHOOL PLACE
PLANNING

3.3: Aims

of the Restructure

The aims of restructure have been shared with LAP staff and stakeholders for their comment. They are as follows:

3.3.1. To ensure clear purpose matched to priorities

The Council's overall aim for each area of Children's Services is to have clear purpose and strong identity, well understood by staff, stakeholders, the wider council and partners that reflects the needs and priorities of schools and settings, the expectations of parents and stakeholders and the requirements of regulatory bodies. However, feedback from staff and stakeholders clearly indicates that the current structure does not provide clear purpose or strong identify and is insufficiently aligned to local and national priorities.

For example, the management structure as recorded on BWO does not include leadership for special educational needs which is a major priority for the council given escalating demand, a significant improvement agenda and an accumulating deficit in the High Needs budget. SEND is a national priority as set out in the Government's Review of SEND Green Paper.

In parallel, the government's White Paper, Opportunity for All clarifies and strengthens local authority key functions in a changing educational landscape. It sets out clear expectation of integrated, partnership working, particularly to improve fair access and educational outcomes for the most vulnerable learners. The existing management structure, designed around single service management, does not support integrated leadership or the coordinated approaches required to drive a whole system focus on vulnerable children and families.

3.3.2. To strengthen strategic capacity to predict & manage demand, plan provision & prevent crises

There is an urgent need for education services to better understand and predict need, for example for school places and specialist provision. The existing structure does not provide the strategic capacity required to undertake this crucial function in an integrated way nor to plan effectively, in partnership with schools, to meet these future needs. Crisis management is the inevitable outcome which depletes the capacity of the service to operate strategically.

3.3.3. To strengthen accountability for early intervention to reduce the deficit in the High Needs Budget

Significant financial deficit is accumulating in the High Needs Budget as a consequence of rising demand for statutory SEND plans and provision. The current structure does not model early intervention pathways of support (Graduated Response) for children with additional and special educational needs. Strengthening early intervention and prevention is fundamental to mitigating this growing financial pressure.

3.3.4. To establish a permanent & manageable accountability structure

Numerous temporary management arrangements currently operate in the Learning, Achievement & Partnerships service area. In addition to 6 manager posts recorded on the BWO system, temporary arrangements include 3 additional direct reports to the Assistant Director. These are Education Welfare Service, Adult Education, & CAMHS Phoenix PRU. The AD currently has 9 direct reports which is unsustainable.

3.3.5. To establish a fair distribution of accountabilities across management posts , including & accountability for integrated working

Management posts in the existing structure are at varying grades with varying spans of staff management and financial accountability. The posts largely focus on the delivery of a single service and are operational rather than strategic. This does not support integrated cross-service & partnership working, and shared accountability for outcomes for children.

3.3.6. To deliver corporate savings in line with savings targets and the strategic capacity to identify and deliver future savings

Corporate savings targets are attached to the overall restructure of Learning, Achievement & Partnerships. These are £75k in 2022-23 and £125k in 2023-24. Phase 1 of the restructure (this proposal) delivers the 22-23 savings through cessation of one post in the current BWO structure (Targeted Learning). 2023-24 savings will be delivered through Phase 2 of the restructure. It is likely that these will come from areas of the existing service where education core functions and statutory duties are subject to change as indicated in the government White Paper, Opportunity for All (March 22).

3.4 Key Feedback from Staff and Stakeholders

Respondents universally expressed strong support for these aims overall and no changes have been suggested.

They particularly highlighted the need to improve clarity of purpose, accountability, integrated management and leadership & communication. Whilst staff recognise their direct contribution to specific high-level functions, they do not have a clear understanding of the whole picture for the LAP service area.

There is strong staff and stakeholder support to review the education service structure in the context of a changing educational landscape of Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts.

School leaders have strongly welcomed restructure given the publication of the Education White and Green Papers (March 2022). Both clarify local authority key functions in a changing educational landscape, placing increased emphasis on integrated, partnership working to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable learners and those with SEND. School leaders are particularly keen to develop a more sector-led school improvement model in line with the government's White Paper.

Staff are keen for education services to be more integrated. They consistently refer to individual services being isolated. Staff have expressed the view that budget savings could be more easily achieved if working arrangements were more integrated.

Many respondents suggested a change to the service area's name of 'Learning, Achievement & Partnerships (LAP)' to 'Education' on the basis that the term, especially when referred to as 'LAP', is not well understood.

Respondents recognise that an organisation structure will not of itself improve outcomes for children unless it is supported by the following:

- Systematic collaboration and coproduction with schools.
- Fit for purpose IT systems that facilitate the delivery of core education functions. Current IT systems impede strategic & operational capacity, slow down delivery and generate frustration across the system.
- Roles, responsibilities & priorities are clearly defined and understood by all.
- People are brought together systematically and more formally to manage, co-produce and drive complex priorities. For example, Children Missing Education, Closing the Disadvantage Gap, school place planning, etc.
- Shared accountability between education and strategic commissioning functions.

Staff have highlighted important sub-sets of high-level functions to inform phase 2 of the LAP restructure.

4. Education Policy Papers - May 2022

The government has recently published two education policy papers:

- Education White Paper, Opportunity for All
- Education Green Paper, SEND Review

These papers set out strengthened responsibilities for children on SEND, social care, attendance, admissions, place planning and other key education functions.

Clear expectations of local authorities and schools (increasingly in large multi-academy trusts) include:

- A fully trust-led system with a single regulatory approach
- A clear role for every part of the school system with local authorities empowered to champion the interests of children, especially the most vulnerable, and a new collaborative standard requiring trusts to work constructively with all other partners.
- Better behaviour and higher attendance through more effective use of data, new legal powers for local authorities and a national data system to drive up attendance making it possible for agencies to protect vulnerable children. (see above section on Attendance).
- A system that works for vulnerable children and children with SEND including a single national SEND and alternative provision system, and local Inclusion Plans and a strengthened role for local authority local admissions arrangements. This includes the local authority managing in-year applications, convening multi-agency in-year placement panels for vulnerable and unplaced children, and having the backstop power to direct admission of a child if required.
- A system that meets communities' need for good school places ensuring a suitable place for every child. This includes the forecasting of pupil place needs and identifying viable options for mainstream, alternative provision and special schools, including via the Free School presumption process. It also gives power to local authorities to object to the Schools Adjudicator about pupil admissions numbers (PANs) for mainstream schools where there is a need for an increase.

It is expected that these changes will increase the speed with which local authorities and safeguarding agencies can intervene when there are concerns and reduce the time vulnerable children spend out of school.

Background

Analysis of Issues

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	n/a		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
n/a

Cross-Council Implications
n/a

Public Sector Equality Duty
n/a

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
n/a

List of Background Papers
n/a

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