

Executive Summary of Education Review August 2017

Purpose of Report

On December the 8th 2016 the Leader of the Council, Councillor John Holdich OBE publically announced that he had commissioned a critical and objective appraisal of Peterborough City Council's action plan to support teaching and learning in the local authority area.

Fundamentally I was tasked with reviewing our role within education and the support we currently provide and whether there is anything further we can do to improve the education offered to our children and young people. There was also a desire to test whether the challenges the Council felt exist in Peterborough's education system are accurate and exhaustive.

The review was commissioned against the context of changing national legislation which dramatically altered the City Council's role and responsibilities in relation to the management of schools and the publication of Key Stage 2 results which placed Peterborough 151st out of 152 local authorities in England.

Peterborough was faced with the scenario of being one of the best areas of the country for the number of schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted, yet attainment being one of the weakest.

To aid my task, a review was commissioned from the Nullam Group, as recommended by the national education charity Success for All, to consider the challenges identified by the City Council and to confirm if it has identified these correctly. It was also to consider whether the interventions and actions currently in place to support improvement in schools are the most effective and if there is anything else the Council could reasonably do.

In addition I was supported by John Harris Consulting who reviewed organisational structures to deliver school improvement, John took me through the review he had concluded towards the end of 2016.

The present government introduced changes to education funding that have reduced income received by local authorities for their statutory roles. Furthermore, general local government funding has reduced substantially whilst service demands have increased. This has led to the creation of more shared education services between Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council, this includes the sharing of the Service Director role. This new model of working has been supported by the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office which is now the responsible body for all Academy Schools in the Local Authority.

Key Findings

Conducting this extensive review has led me to believe that Peterborough faces what can only be described as a unique set of challenges. These mean that schools face more of a challenge than their counterparts in other areas of the country to achieve expected standards for pupils.

Paul Brooker, Regional Director for Ofsted in the East of England has said that Peterborough could be uniquely challenged.

As part of the review the outgoing Regional Schools Commissioner, Dr Tim Coulson, commented that “the structures set up within Peterborough are very good and could be more utilised within Cambridgeshire itself. Peterborough however was more challenged in its schools due to a diverse pupil population.”

The Nullam report commented further on the present situation within Peterborough:

“Peterborough has a much greater share of children who have English as an additional language (EAL) than is the case nationally. At both primary and secondary level this is now approximately double the rate seen for England as a whole, both at primary and secondary level.

“EAL rates have consistently been above those for England as a whole since 2003/4, the earliest year looked at, but these have pulled away from the national figure in the intervening period, particularly at primary level.

“Such a trend will, without question, have placed extra demands on schools in Peterborough – which may not have been reflected fully in the amount of funding available to the authority, and to schools in the area.”

“The mid-year movement into and between Peterborough schools is significantly above the national average”

“School population growth in Peterborough has been at a rate well above that nationally. Between 2005 and 2016 primary population rose by 29% in Peterborough versus 10% for England as a whole”

This extensive review that I have undertaken has led me to believe that Peterborough does most certainly have a unique set of challenges that cannot be denied.

My in depth review has resulted in a number of key recommendations:

- Introduce a more systematic arrangement for collecting, analysing and using data to enable targeting of school improvement activity
- Work together as a system to tackle the challenges (local authority, schools, teaching schools, Regional Schools Commissioner’s office, Ofsted, wider children and adult services and other education providers)
- Introduce a more transparent process for setting school based targets that are owned by the system
- Schools demonstrate a strong commitment to the Peterborough Self-Improving Network; look to remodel this to more effectively respond to the challenges that have been identified; drawing on best practice from elsewhere, Teaching Schools and the wider system

- Increase the number of Teaching Schools in the city. These are strong schools that offer support and training to other local schools
- Identify leading head teachers from the primary and secondary sectors to work closely with the Local Authority and Regional Schools Commissioner's Office
- Focus attention on improving recruitment and retention of teachers
- Focus attention on narrowing the gap between free school meal and SEN students and students in all primary schools
- Focus attention on where churn is having the most impact and agree as a whole education system what to do about this
- Embark on a high profile campaign to raise public awareness about the importance of education achievement

It is clear that we all have to unite and work together to address the issues that we face. Only by coming together can we agree to one common commitment and vision for education in Peterborough.

I believe that we can achieve that by establishing a Strategic Board for Education, Further Education and Skills to ensure a bold educational strategy across the whole authority area. Similar boards are being set up in Leicester, Doncaster and Hounslow.

This board would represent all stakeholders and importantly would bring unity across our schools. It would promote data sharing, local improvement priorities such as how we can support one another in dealing with high levels of churn, how we can better support vulnerable learners, and how we can all meet national priorities. It would offer a united approach to education.

Another of my key recommendations is to develop a clear vision and mission for education locally. The vision should be to Educate Together and the mission should be to Improve Education Together - both reflecting the united approach that is so crucial. It will require the full support of every school, every governor and every parent of every child.

This clear strategy should support 'an education system that works for all children in Peterborough'.

A close working relationship between the City Council's Education Department and the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office is absolutely vital to achieve our goal of improved attainment.

The City Council continues to have a statutory responsibility for monitoring, challenging and supporting in relation to local authority maintained schools causing concern. The council officers and schools need to have transparent targets and plans to achieve these together.

The Local Authority also has a role to play in supporting the recruitment of good quality teachers. I recommend that the Council, along with the Regional Schools Commissioner, promotes the establishment of additional Teaching Schools in Peterborough, which can support new and experienced school staff with high-quality training and development.

In addition, schools should be involved in the Teach East Programme, or another

programme of the same ilk as training locally is obviously very effective to obtain newly qualified trained teachers. Teach East was set up by the Council in partnership with a number of schools and has just been rated Good by Ofsted. In the last academic year, 29 trainees successfully qualified and gained employment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that there is real ambition from everyone involved in education in Peterborough to provide the very best education possible for every student. No one should underestimate the hard work that is already underway or how much time and effort is being devoted to an unrelenting focus on all our challenges.

The review carried out by Nullam saw examples of outstanding practice in schools which now needs to be better shared across schools to encourage adoption of best practice.

Many of the comments made by our school leaders can be addressed by a new strategic direction for education in Peterborough, which will see everyone pulling together for one common aim - to provide our children with the best education possible, given the circumstances that many of our children and young people face.

In addition, the Executive Director for People and Communities has already arranged for a conference to take place on 20 September 2017 where it is intended to bring as many head teachers and relevant council officers together with the Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted to discuss a new Vision and Mission for education in the city.

The local authority, given its role in education today, cannot achieve the success that our children and young people deserve on its own. However it can work as part of a united system to achieve the improvements in attainment that are so critical.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to my report. Let's move forward together.