

Select Committee on Children's Services – 15 September 2008

Report of the Director of Children's Services

The School Improvement Partner Programme

Purpose of Report

1. This report updates the Select Committee on the progress and impact of the School Improvement Partner Programme.

Background

2. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act made it compulsory for Local Authorities to appoint a School Improvement Partner for all schools by April 2008.
3. School Improvement Partners are nationally accredited professionals with the relevant experience to carry out the Local Authority's statutory duty to monitor, challenge and support schools in their drive to raise standards and improve the quality of provision.

Progress to date

Appointment of School Improvement Partners

4. The Local Authority complied with the statutory requirement to appoint School Improvement Partners to all schools by April 2008. Over 30 primary schools and all special schools entered the programme six months early as a result of effective targeting of the recruitment programme.
5. All School Improvement Partner appointments conformed to the 'Conditions of Grant' criteria laid down by national policy and, therefore, Dudley secured the contribution from national funding to help support implementation of the programme. Failure to achieve either of these points would have left the Local Authority at risk of intervention from

the National Strategies on behalf of the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

Leadership and Management of the School Improvement Partner Programme

6. The School Improvement Partner programme is externally monitored by the National Strategies on behalf of the Department of Children, Schools and Families. Each term the Local Authority is held to account by three regional School Improvement Partner co-ordinators (primary, secondary and special) working for the National Strategies Team. At each visit a judgement against national criteria is generated against each area of the School Improvement Partner programme. As a consequence the Local Authority is rated on a 'red, amber, green' (RAG) rating. These ratings determine the level of support and/or intervention required by the National Strategies Team. Dudley's RAG rating for the implementation and impact of this programme has consistently been green (good). Each phase of the programme (primary, secondary and special) has also consistently attained a green (good) rating.

Extracts from June 2008 National Strategy Evaluation report

Evaluation of overall effectiveness of the School Improvement Partner programme

7. The School Improvement Partner Managers have taken a great deal of time to put systems in place to evaluate evidence from a range of sources. The Local Authority continues to know its schools very well, employing resources in a timely and focused manner to support school improvement and to ensure that risk management is secure.

Evaluation of the effective targeting of Local Authority National Strategy resources

8. The model for allocating resources is clear and explicitly shared with all colleagues to ensure that resources have the greatest impact on outcomes. The Local Authority deploys its resources with a high level of strategic thinking and this is enabled because the Local Authority continues to know its schools so well.

Evaluation of risk management and intervention for Schools Causing Concern

9. There was a clear sense of accountability for standards and progress from the School Improvement Partner Managers and this must surely have an impact on colleagues who work in such a positive can do culture.
10. In addition to external evaluation, the Local Authority has set up a rigorous internal monitoring system. This system takes the view of schools, heads, governors and the School Improvement Partners to help triangulate the impact of the work being undertaken. To date, feedback from this internal quality assurance is very positive. Schools and School Improvement Partners have commented upon the quality of the work undertaken in Dudley and the growing links made between School Improvement Partners and other Local Authority services.

Impact on School Performance

11. Dudley schools improvement in national tests and examinations, and their performance in Ofsted inspections, has continued the upward trend of recent years.
12. At present no Dudley school is judged by Ofsted to require Special Measures and only one school has a Notice to Improve. This is the lowest figure for several years. The percentage of schools judged to have good or outstanding leadership and management since September 2005 is 58.6% primary, 70% for secondary and 70% for special schools.
13. Standards at the end of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 continue to improve with Dudley's performance being generally in line with national averages.
14. The impact of the Local Authority improvement strategies and targeting of resources has been judged good by the National Strategies and the Local Authority self-assessment for APA 2008 concurs with this. The integration of the School Improvement Policy programme into the work of the Local Authority, at this point, would indicate that it has helped in the success that has been achieved.

Finance

15. The work undertaken by the SIP programme is funded by the Local Authority and Standards Fund grant.

Law

16. The legal powers applicable are set out in paragraphs 2 and 3.

Equality Impact

17. The School Improvement Partner programme is aimed to ensure that every child in every Dudley school receives the best possible standard of education and achieves the highest possible level of achievement.

Recommendation

18. It is recommended that the Select Committee consider the report and remit it for detailed discussion to the School Performance Working Group.



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