



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 13 September 2021

REPORT TITLE:	WIRRAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024
REPORT OF:	SIMONE WHITE – DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report presents the Children, Young People and Education Committee with the School Improvement Strategy 2021-24.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most challenging emergency the Borough of Wirral and the Council has responded to in recent times. The nature of the pandemic saw the Council and education settings react at speed to implement Government policy and local priorities to limit the spread of the virus, protect the health of all our residents and ensure that our children and young people could continue to access education.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of young people and our educational institutions cannot be underestimated and it is essential that we now focus on a new era of change and support moving forward.

The local authority is committed to provide schools with an enhanced school improvement service offer, in recognition of the reduced offer of school improvement, given the need to divert resources to focus on dealing with COVID.

This School Improvement Strategy as attached at appendix 1 sets out the Council's vision and ambition around school improvement. It forms part of a wider multi-factorial Education Strategy which will provide a new transformational and holistic approach to education across all areas, including early years, social care, early help and beyond.

The report and strategy are aligned to proposed priorities of Wirral Council's Plan 2026. -Brighter futures for all regardless of their background.

This is a key decision.

This matter affects residents across the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the School Improvement Strategy 2021 – 2024;
2. Note the approach taken and ongoing support given to the school system by Wirral local authority; and,
3. Agree to receive an update on the progress towards implementation of the Strategy in 12 months.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Children, Young People and Education Committee has a role to play in ensuring that the local authority and partners are working collectively to improve outcomes for children and young people across Wirral local authority. The School Improvement Strategy 2021-2024 provides an opportunity for the Committee to understand the actions being taken to support schools across the local authority and seeks endorsement for the actions being taken.
- 1.2 The local authority has a statutory duty “to promote high standards so that children and young people achieve well and fulfil their potential” as set out within the Education Act 1996. This Strategy provides the framework through which those responsibilities will be fulfilled.
- 1.3 The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruption to children and young people’s education and forced re-prioritisation of resources to respond accordingly. It is important, as the Council transitions out of ‘response and recovery’ from COVID-19, to articulate a clear and robust plan to work collaboratively with schools to support improvements in attainment and pupil learning outcomes. This Strategy seeks to respond to the challenges presented from COVID-19, providing the necessary support and critical friend challenge to drive improvements and enable young people to achieve their aspirations.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the current operations of school improvement and the self-improving system. Failure to articulate a clear plan moving forward presents a risk that the system may become fragmented and impact on the positive relationship between schools and the local authority.
- 2.2 Produce a wider Education Strategy: The School Improvement Strategy is the building block as part of a wider Education Strategy. It is important, in the current context, that it stands alone to demonstrate the importance of progress which needs to be made in this area. Including plans around school improvement within an overarching Education Strategy would potentially dilute the focus and priority of work needed in this area.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The School Improvement Strategy 2021-2024 sets out the local authorities plans to secure and deliver a high-quality school improvement service to all schools, which is appropriate and relevant to meet their need. It will form part of an overarching

Education Strategy for the borough which will cut across many other organisational areas such as social care and health.

3.2 The Strategy sets out a vision for school improvement to: *raise aspirations and improve outcomes for all children in Wirral*. It aligned to the proposed Wirral Plan 2026 and the priority to secure brighter futures for all regardless of their background. It outlines activity which is structured around the following themes:

- **Leadership and governance:** Effective school leadership is critical in improving educational outcomes, promoting high expectations and meeting the rigorous demands of Ofsted and the Department for Education. The School Improvement Strategy set out plans to empower headteachers, governors and senior leaders to build leadership capacity, secure better teaching and learning and deliver whole-school improvement.
- **High Support, High Challenge:** The local authority has a role to monitor, challenge and, where necessary, intervene in maintained schools. The Strategy sets out a plan to build on the current banding process and develop a prioritisation model which allows for school improvement support to be coordinated appropriately. This will also include setting out a transparent Schools Causing Concern policy, where early-stage monitoring and challenge do not result in rapid improvement.
- **Self-improving school system:** Strong governance and accountability is essential to success of an effective self-improving system and effective collaboration and partnerships provide the foundations for this. The Strategy outlines how the local authority will work with key stakeholders to develop a robust self-improving system which enables schools to hold each other to account for progress and performance and quality assurance measures which assess the impact of partnership activity.
- **Learning and innovation:** There is huge value in using evidence-based learning to inform professional practice and organisational decision-making. Research and evidence have a significant role to play in informing practice in schools and in school improvement. The Strategy outlines plans to ensure that our future schools and education leaders utilise effective improvement strategies based on evidence-based research whilst also having opportunity to explore innovative solutions to complex problems.
- **School Improvement Wirral:** The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the provision of a dedicated school improvement function to perform effectively. Transitioning out of the pandemic will enable resources to increase capacity in the School Improvement Team, appointing permanent school advisors to enable

the local authority to fulfil its duties in monitoring performance and brokering school improvement provision

- 3.3 It is anticipated that the Strategy will take three years to deliver and to allow for new systems and activity to become embedded. In the first year, the development of the School Improvement Service will enable capacity to drive forward and co-ordinate robust governance arrangements and networks to allow the self-improving system to become effective.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from the report. Delivery of the Strategy will be funded through existing resources. This will be via ringfenced funding through the Monitoring and Brokering Grant.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no significant legal implications arising out of the report. The local authority has a statutory duty to “promote high standards so that children and young people achieve well and fulfil their potential” as set out within the Education Act 1996. There is other statutory guidance and legislation which align with this strategy including ‘*Schools Causing Concern: Statutory Guidance*’. All relevant guidance will be considered and adhered to in delivery of the Strategy.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Resource identified will increase capacity within the School Improvement Team to deliver on the priorities and actions outlined in the Strategy. The appointment of School Advisors to broker and co-ordinate support for schools will provide the infrastructure to enable the local authority to fulfil its duties. Further capacity will also be commissioned through school leaders and assurance partners.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 There is a risk that the capacity in the School Improvement Team will not be realised and/or that applicants to the School Advisor and Assurance Professional roles may not meet the essential criteria. This could impact on the timeliness of delivering the Strategy and/or the ability to effectively support all schools equitably across the borough. This risk can be mitigated by engaging proactively with potential candidates to secure interest in the roles and to ensure that the recruitment process is professional and customer focussed.
- 7.2 There is a risk that the relationship with schools may become compromised, impacting on the ability to effectively develop new governance and locality arrangements which provide the framework for the self-improving school’s system. This can be mitigated by engaging with schools from the outset in any new governance proposals, seeking their views and involvement.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 A draft plan on a page was developed prior to the finalisation of the written Strategy and shared with various stakeholders including:

- School headteachers
- School senior leadership teams
- Children's Senior Leadership Team
- Senior managers within Children's Services
- Education partners

Feedback and views following these engagement sessions were considered and proved useful in formulating and developing plans to move forward.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no significant environment and climate implications. The School Improvement Team will play a role in supporting schools with curriculum development, where this is needed and appropriate. A rich curriculum respects and acknowledges the need to promote and understand the impact of climate change and promote positive attitudes to protecting the environment. The School Improvement Team will play a role in promoting it as part of positive learning for children and young people.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Strategy intends to create a system of improvement which exists within Wirral leaders and schools. Plans to strengthen the school improvement offer will seek to recruit from local leaders where possible and create further opportunities for local system leaders. Another important element of the Strategy is embedding an approach to succession planning through robust training and development programmes for current teachers and deputy headteachers so that they can supported to become Wirral leaders of the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Wirral School Improvement Strategy 2021- 2024

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Education Act 1996](#)

[Schools Causing Concern Guidance](#)

[Wirral Schools Strategy](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date