Wirral School Improvement Strategy

2021 - 2024

WIRRAL

FOREWORD

Councillor Wendy Clements, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

The Children, Young People and Education Committee has responsibility, together with the Director for Children, Families and Education to ensure fair access to a diverse supply of good schools and secure access to high quality educational activity.

As Chair of the Committee, I am delighted therefore, to introduce this School Improvement Strategy which marks the start of a new and reinvigorated strategic focus on education.

The past year has showcased the creativity, commitment and professionalism from the teaching profession and highlighted the role of schools as pivotal in our communities.

We must harness our efforts and continue our endeavour to support young people's learning and life chances, embedding effective and holistic support which is rooted in evidence learning and inspired by collective system change.

This School Improvement Strategy articulates clear plans to:

- create the right conditions for sector-led school- to-school support
- ensure that local authority can fulfil its duties through a new School Improvement Wirral Service
- develop plans to intervene and prevent/reduce escalation or risk in line with statutory responsibilities

Fundamental to the success of this Strategy will be the vital partnerships between schools, the local authority, governors and wider stakeholders, who, with clear vision and shared desire can support learning outcomes for Wirral's young people.

James Backhouse, Assistant Director - Education

I am proud to have been appointed to the Assistant Director for Education in March 2021.

There are many, many excellent schools in Wirral – over 80% rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Our schools provide security, quality curricula and enrichment opportunities which help children and young people to thrive.

As a parent living in Wirral, I have first-hand knowledge of how the pandemic has disrupted children's education. As Assistant Director, I have been astounded by the effort and determination of our school leaders, staff and wider support officers who have worked tirelessly to put measures in place to ensure that learning can continue during the most challenging times.

I am determined to transition out of the pandemic with a reinvigorated approach to school improvement and to make sure that schools have high support and high challenge to enable them to continue to improve and ensure that outcomes for children and young people remain positive.

This three-year Strategy sets out our plans to secure and deliver a high-quality school improvement service to all schools, which is appropriate and relevant to meet their need. It is the first step towards developing an overarching Education Strategy for the borough which will cut across many other organisational areas such as social care and health.

INTRODUCTION

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.

This required a remarkable effort by schools in partnership with the local authority, all who worked tirelessly and acted with compassion to protect, support and educate our children.

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 keen to build and harness the positive relationships and collaborative working with education settings and wider education partners which materialised because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The local authority is also 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 is firstly to support schools in responding the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's education and secondly to demonstrate the Council's value and importance on working proactively with schools and education settings to improve educational outcomes over the next three years.

The appointment of a new Assistant Director for Education will help to create the right environment and provide good leadership across the education landscape to drive an effective self-improving school system and create a culture of quality and constructive critical friend challenge.

This School Improvement Strategy 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.

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ABOUT WIRRAL

Wirral is one of the largest metropolitan boroughs in England. It has a current population of 322,796 (48.4% Male/ 51.6% Female) which is set to increase by 3% to 334,500 in 2040. The area is rich in natural beauty with 24 miles of coastlines, 50 miles of rural walking routes and cycling areas and some of the best parks and green spaces in the country – boasting 30 green flags.

Wirral has areas of affluence and high deprivation. Almost two-thirds of the population live in the east of the borough, where levels of deprivation are higher. It also has a diverse make up in terms of age, with a relatively higher older population and a low proportion of people in their twenties and thirties.

Strategic Vision

Wirral Council and its partners have a vision to create *Equity for People and Place: To create equity for people and place and opportunities for all to secure the best possible future for our residents, communities and businesses.* This is articulated in the borough's five-year plan which sets out a set of key priorities to create:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all
- A clean-energy, sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis.
- Brighter futures for all regardless of their background.
- Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of.
- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time

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4.2

Education Context

There are 379 settings that provide childcare and early education. There are 90 primary schools and 19 secondary schools. Wirral has 10 special schools, one hospital school, one all-through school and a virtual school.

Attainment and Progress (2019)

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to fully evaluate education attainment and progress.

At the end of the 2019/20 academic year, primary schools shared their Key Stage 2 outcomes based on teacher assessments, given that there were no exams during that year. This has allowed comparison nationally and regionally. However, an element of caution will always remain on the results.

Phonics

For 2019/20 academic year, outcomes for all pupils in phonics increased for the second year by 1% to 82%. Wirral schools' phonics results are now in line with emerging national data. Northwest ranking has improved significantly from

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23/23 in 2017 to 5/23 in 2019. Funding from the School Improvement Fund (SIF) of £800,000 to improve outcomes in phonics resulted in a 4.5% increase in phonics results in over 21 schools.

Early Years Foundation Stage

In 2019/20, the percentage of children attaining a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the age of 5 declined by 1.1% to 69.5%. GLD for Wirral schools is now 3% below the emerging national average. Wirral ranks 9th out of 23 Local Authorities in the Northwest. The variance in GLD outcomes between schools in Wirral has increased and several schools have dropped by 15 - 20 percentage points.

Key Stage 1

Performance in Key Stage 1 is below the national average. In 2019/20, 60.8% of children at the age of 7 attained the expected standard in Reading and Writing and Mathematics combined (RWM) compared with 65% nationally.

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Key Stage 2

Outcomes in Key Stage 2, Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined for 2019/20 remained the same as the previous year.

KS2 (RWM)	2016	2017	2018	2019
Wirral	49	57	60	60
National	54	61	64	65
GAP to National	-5	-4	-4	-5

Overall performance is below the national average. Historically Wirral has performed well in reading and writing at Key Stage 2 but reading outcomes dropped. In 2018, 74% of pupils attained expected level in reading and 76% in writing. 2019 results declined both nationally and in Wirral. Wirral's performance in Reading dropped to 69% and writing outcomes decreased by 1%. Mathematics outcomes improved by 4% compared to an increase nationally of 3% so narrowing the gap to 4%.

Key Stage 4

All the key measures at Key Stage 4 remain positive. Performance in Progress 8 and Attainment 8 remains above the national average. At Progress 8, Wirral is second in the Northwest, 0.05 above the average. Wirral is 1.5% above the average at attainment 8 and ranked 4/23.

KS4 Progress 8	2017	NW rank	2018	NW rank	2019	NW rank
Wirral	0.01	4/23	0.03	2/23	0.01	2/23
National	-0.03		-0.02		-0.04	
GAP	+0.04		+0.05		+0.05	

% Ebacc 5+	2017	NW rank	2018	NW rank	2019	NW rank
Wirral	28	2/23	24	2/23	21	2/23
National	21		17		17	
GAP	+7		+7		+4	

The number of pupils in Wirral achieving 4+ and 5+ in English and Maths improved in all areas in 2018. For those achieving 5+ in Maths, this improved performance continued in 2019 with Wirral above the national average and 4th in ranking against other Northwest authorities. Whilst performance in the other areas declined

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slightly in 2019, Wirral remains above or in line with the national average and compares favourably against regional neighbours. The performance decline in 4+ Maths can be attributable to one secondary school where there was a significant decrease.

English 4+	2017	NW rank	2018	NW rank	2019	NW rank
Wirral	78	4/23	80	3/23	77	5/23
National	76		75		75	
Maths 4+	2017		2018		2019	
Wirral	71	6/23	73	4/23	69	8/23
National	69		70		70	
English 5+	2017		2018		2019	
Wirral	64	5/23	65	4/23	63	5/23
National	61		60		60	
Maths 5+						
Wirral	49	3/23	51	4/23	50	4/23
National	49		49		48	

Key Stage 5

KS5	2017/18	2018/19
Average point score per entry (APS)	32.1	34.7
Best 3 A Levels as a grade	B-	B-
AAB	17.2%	20.4%

In 2018/19 nearly a quarter of all pupils achieved AAB grades at A' level. The average points per A-level increased and there was an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving AAB (by 5.5%) but the overall grade for the best three A levels remained the same (B-).

Wirral has performed better that the national average consistently for three years.

5. Inspection judgements

5.1 84% of Wirral settings are rated as Good or Outstanding. None are judged inadequate. Prior to lockdown in March 2020, 18 inspections of schools were carried out compared with 23 in 2018-19 and 39 in 2017-18. No schools were judged to be in Special Measures. Three schools were downgraded with one infant school unexpectedly downgraded from outstanding to requires improvement.

5.2 Four schools in total (two last year and two this year) have had Section 8 inspections graded as 'good'.

Partnership arrangements

The COVID-19 pandemic strengthened communication between the local authority and education settings. Regular communication channels were established through weekly meetings with primary, secondary, and special school headteachers and a weekly discussion was held with the Director for Children, Families and Education. This communication system ensured that information was channelled effectively. Schools responded positively with one headteacher reporting that schools have "felt supported and well-led during this unprecedented time".

School Ofsted inspection reports have recognised the positive relationship between the local authority and schools.

Wirral Plan Vision: *Equity for People and Place: To create equity for people and place and opportunities for all to secure the best possible future for our residents, communities and businesses.*

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Wirral School Improvement Vision: *To raise aspirations and improve outcomes for all children in Wirral*	
Conditions for effective school improvement*	**Evidence**
Clear and compelling vision	Through this Strategy, we want to co-ordinate and provide strategic push and to clarify roles and responsibilities within complex education landscape.
Trust and high social capital	We will build a model for effective relationships and partnership working. We have a shared values and desire to find solutions.
Engagement from schools and academies	We want to get everyone on board with this Strategy. We want to reach out to schools, academies and MATs with a good offer for all local children.
Leadership from key system leaders	Wirral System Leaders are effective in working constructively with schools manage risk and drive improvement.
Crucial convening and facilitative role for the LA	This Strategy sets out how the Council will fulfil its convening and facilitative role in school improvement.
Sufficient capacity for school-to-school support	Additional capacity now being channelled to school improvement and to facilitate effective school-to-school support.
Effective links with regional partners	The local authority has strong links with regional partners and insight organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation.
Sufficient financial contributions	Additional funding has been identified to enable the School Improvement Service to be appropriated and effective.
Structure to enable partnership activity	The Strategy sets out plans to review and refresh partnership activity to build effective structure for partnerships and accountability.

**LGA "Enabling School Improvement" Research into the role of local authorities in supporting local school improvement systems*

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.

We know that having great leaders can help create great teachers and that having great teachers is a significant factor in successful outcomes for children and young people.

We want to empower headteachers, governors and senior leaders to build leadership capacity, secure better teaching and learning and deliver whole-school improvement.

It is essential that we can offer excellent professional support and training, appropriate career pathways and opportunities and fewer obstacles to recruitment and retention.

Over the next three years, we want to:

Theme 2:

- Develop an extensive and holistic Continued Professional Development programme offering a range of training and development opportunities to strengthen leadership at all levels. We intend to align this programme with the Teaching School Hub, exploiting the benefits and opportunities this brings.
- Increase the capacity of System Leaders within Wirral so that their knowledge and expertise is more targeted to thematic areas or role profiles. We hope to identify system leaders to focus on emerging education priorities, for example, in the first year, we will identify System Leaders for Mathematics and Early Years.
- Provide support and challenge to middle leaders as part of intelligence-led succession planning so that we can develop aspiring headteachers and deputy headteachers of the futures to transition seamlessly into leadership roles.

- Develop a programme of support to improve subject specific curriculum knowledge and teaching expertise.
- Build an enhanced support offer for school governors, starting with an effective recruitment campaign to fill vacant positions and promote and deliver a robust governor training offer led through our partner, Edsential.

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High Support, High Challenge

The Council has responsibility to ensure that schools provide high quality educational experience for children and young people. We must monitor, challenge and, where necessary, intervene in maintained schools.

It is essential to have a timely and effective prioritisation process in place which will allow for early identification of schools where targeted or intervention support is required.

The current school banding process has been effective in identifying 'at risk' schools with the potential of being downgraded by Ofsted and where targeted activity and system leadership support has helped to mitigate and manage challenges and drive improvement.

We want to build on the current banding process and develop a prioritisation model which allows for school improvement support to be coordinated appropriately.

Where early-stage monitoring and challenge do not result in rapid improvement in maintained schools the local authority will consider using its intervention powers in line with DfE guidance: *Schools causing concern: Statutory guidance for local authorities (February 2018).*

Our plan is to:

- Establish a model and pathway for prioritisation which utilises insight, data, and intelligence to provide a thorough understanding of school's position across Wirral. This will involve considering information from education standards and inspection outcomes and quality information provided through direct quality assurance work.
- Embed a prioritisation model (overleaf) which aligns effective school improvement support from the dedicated School Improvement Service and utilises effective partnerships both locally and regionally to address concerns.
- Develop and implement a 'Schools Causing Concern' policy aligned to statutory guidance but which meets local needs and reflects current partnership arrangements.
- Embed a banding system which will allow for early identification of schools or areas where targeted support is required. This banding will be coordinated around the following criteria:

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Proposed Banding Criteria

Band 1 Criteria

- Evaluated as good or outstanding with strong capacity for improvement with the ability to deliver support other schools.
- Led by highly effective system leaders and governors with the capacity to support other schools and undertake outreach work.
- Self-evaluation is robust and accurate.
- Outcomes consistently compare well to national standards and has good value-added scores including those of vulnerable groups of pupils.
- Provision for all groups of learners, including gender, disadvantaged and SEND is good or outstanding.
- Teaching at all key stages is effective and the school's curriculum meets the needs of its pupils.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Band 2

- Currently judged as 'good' or 'outstanding' but is highly likely to be judged 'RI' if inspected or evaluated by external consultants.
- Judged to be requires improvement in its last inspection.
- There are some concerns about leadership and/or governance.
- Performance outcomes are close to national standards but there has been a decline in pupil performance over time
- There are concerns around attendance, behaviour, viability, exclusions, complaints, governance, HR or finance have been identified.
- Vulnerable groups may not be effectively supported, and teaching and learning is inconsistent.
- Any initial concerns around attendance, behaviour, exclusions, complaints, governance, HR or finance may have been identified that require close monitoring.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Band 3

- School is considered high risk and vulnerable: - Judged to be 'requires improvement' (RI) by Ofsted for the last two inspection – judged as serious weaknesses or special measures or at risk of being judged serious weaknesses or special measures
- Leadership capacity is limited
- Standards do not compare well to those nationally over a sustained period
- There are significant concerns around attendance, viability, behaviour, exclusions, complaints, governance, HR or finance
- Vulnerable groups may not be effectively supported, and teaching and learning is inconsistent
- Complex weaknesses have been identified which may include leadership/governance, behaviour and teaching and learning
- Safeguarding is ineffective and there are concerns.

Theme 3:

Self-improving school system

We know that strong governance and accountability is essential to success of an effective self-improving system.

Effective collaboration and partnerships provide the structure for good governance and accountability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the operation and delivery of the current governance arrangements for the self-improving school system. Capacity to maintain the current infrastructure was compromised by the pandemic, where resources had to shift and flex to deal with emerging issues and manage challenges.

This has allowed time to reconsider and reflect on the current arrangements and move forward with a reinvigorated approach to build on what works well.

We want to work with key stakeholders to develop clear structures and systems for holding each school to account for progress and performance and quality assurance measures which assess the impact of partnership activity.

In the next year, our plan is to:

- Review the current self-improving system governance arrangements including role, scope, and membership of the School2School Partnership Board and Locality Boards.
- Outline clear roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in school improvement.
- Establish an effective strategic Board which discusses, analyses, and develops approaches to deal with challenges, disseminate good practice and ensures a key focus on key priority areas such as disadvantaged groups.
- Develop an accountability framework through which effective school clusters/Locality Boards can engage, led by a more robust strategic governance group to oversee and lead support.
- Ensure that our self-improving system is underpinned by evidence-based best practice, opportunities for improvement and identify challenges, opportunities and risk providing constructive critical friend challenge.

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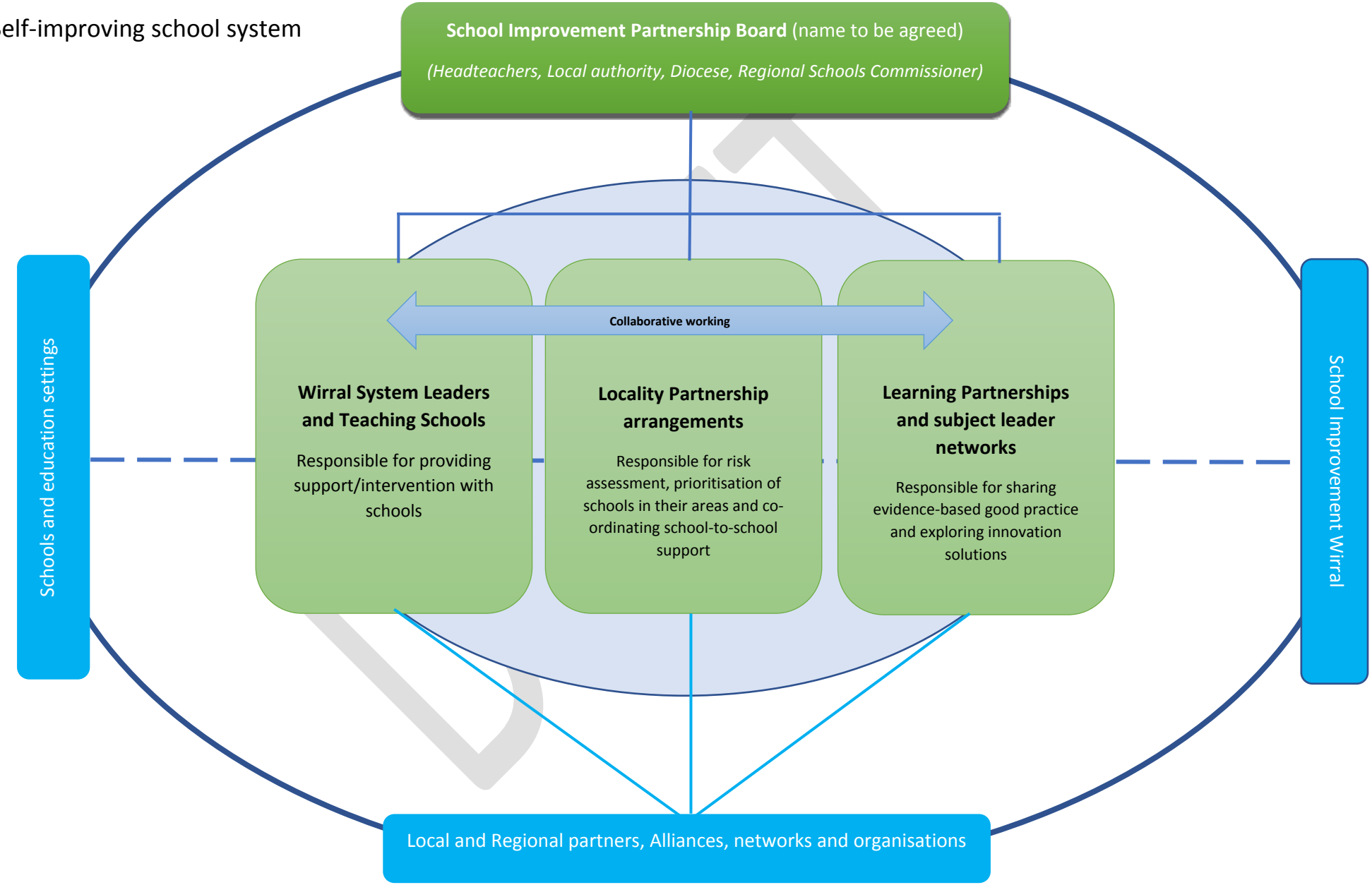
Self-improving school system



Theme 4:

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.

School leaders can play a critical role in making schools evidence-based by using research themselves to inform their own decision-making, by promoting research use more widely within their school and by involving their school in studies which contribute to the evidence base in education.

Over the past few years Wirral has developed and established strong relationships with evidence-based learning organisations on a national and regional footprint to strengthen the areas understanding and knowledge and support schools to implement effective strategies based on evidence of what works.

We have also benefited from learning from pilot initiatives and in learning from innovative approaches to improving attainment and pupil outcomes as well as wider strategies to address attendance, narrowing the gap etc.

We want to ensure that our future schools and education leaders utilise effective improvement strategies based on evidence-based research whilst also have opportunity to explore innovative solutions to complex problems.

In this regard, our plan is to:

- Create new collaborative learning partnerships within the framework of the self-improving system focused on priority areas e.g., subject areas/narrowing the gap etc.

- Create an innovation programme allowing schools to access resources and funding as part of local innovation improvement work
- Appoint thematic specialists with skills, knowledge and experience on subject matter or specialism e.g., early years, literacy, curriculum etc.
- Cement and/or establish relationships with local and regional knowledge networks including the Education Endowment Foundation (already major partner), the Teaching school hub (Ignite), Mathematics Hub and English Hub.

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Theme 5:

School Improvement Wirral

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. Dedicated funding is provided from Government for local authorities to allow them to continue to monitor performance of maintained schools, broker school improvement provision, and intervene as appropriate.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the provision of a dedicated school improvement function to perform effectively. Previous changes to structural arrangements had also limited the operations of the service.

Transitioning out of the pandemic will enable resources to be reinstated towards school improvement, underpinned by the delivery elements outlined within this strategy to provide the framework and priorities for moving forward.

We are committed to providing a School Improvement offer which will

a) establish strong partnerships and a sustainable self-improving school system

b) increase system leadership capacity and expertise and knowledge across the sector; and

c) establish a robust accountability framework which monitors and assess quality and performance through assurance processes.

To do this, our plan is 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.
- embed a quality assurance and performance management framework across the sector through more robust partnership arrangements and the commissioning of school assurance partners to quality check practice and feed into the prioritisation (banding) process for support.
- use a new prioritisation process to identify schools early where intervention and support is required, considering a wide range of key indicators.
- operate a meaningful and balanced system of support around three levels: universal, targeted and intervention.
- create new opportunities for schools to engage in improvement activity and/or commission new activity around key themes/priority areas where this is required.

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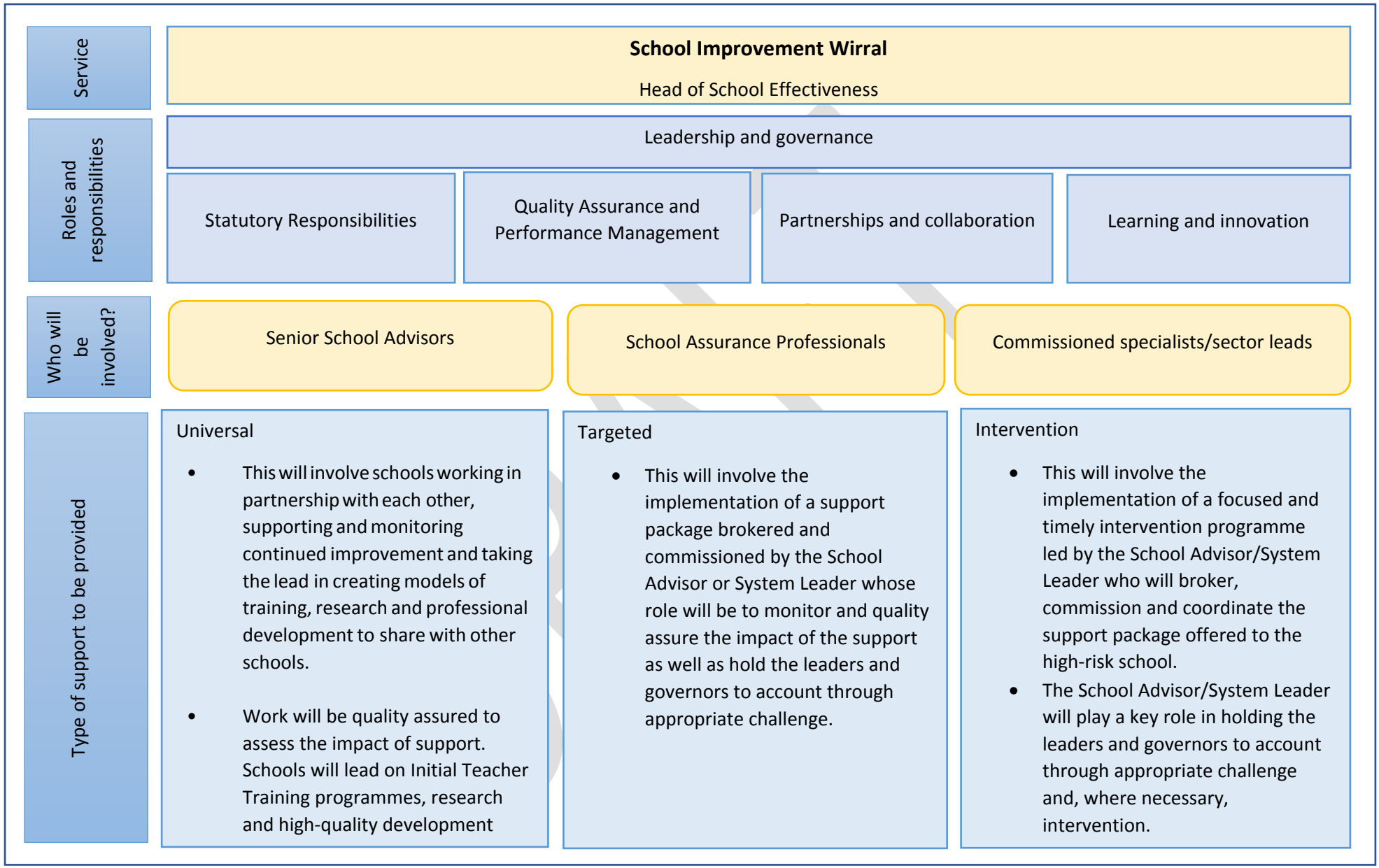
Service
School Improvement Wirral
Head of School Effectiveness
Roles and responsibilities
Leadership and governance
Statutory Responsibilities
Quality Assurance and Performance Management
Partnerships and collaboration
Learning and innovation
Who will be involved?
Senior School Advisors
School Assurance Professionals
Commissioned specialists/sector leads
Type of support to be provided
Universal
This will involve schools working in partnership with each other, supporting and monitoring continued improvement and taking the lead in creating models of training, research and professional development to share with other schools.
Work will be quality assured to assess the impact of support. Schools will lead on Initial Teacher Training programmes, research and high-quality development
Targeted
This will involve the implementation of a support package brokered and commissioned by the School Advisor or System Leader whose role will be to monitor and quality assure the impact of the support as well as hold the leaders and governors to account through appropriate challenge.
Intervention
This will involve the implementation of a focused and timely intervention programme led by the School Advisor/System Leader who will broker, commission and coordinate the support package offered to the high-risk school.
The School Advisor/System Leader will play a key role in holding the leaders and governors to account through appropriate challenge and, where necessary, intervention.