

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Services Select Committee**  
**08 June 2010**

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**Primary School Strategy:  
Securing Primary School Improvement through the World Class Primary Plan**

**Executive summary**

This report provides an update on the recent developments within primary school improvement, including the development of a World Class Primary Plan for Wiltshire which was sent to the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) on the 30 April 2010. On 12 May 2010, since the coalition government this became the Department for Education (DfE).

Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan includes:

- An outline of Wiltshire's vision and strategic direction and success measures.
- The School Improvement Cycle including the role of the School Improvement Partner and how the cycle works in Wiltshire.
- How schools and the Local Authority categorise schools to identify and determine the level and nature of support required.
- An outline of portfolio of support programmes that are available to enable continuous school improvement
- How we work with strategic partners to support schools, including the Dioceses, and
- How we support and challenge schools and the accountability within the Local Authority.

The plan captures and builds upon current best practice and sets out how we work with Primary Schools to support and secure improvement. Since the change of Government the status of the World Class Primary Plan is unclear with pending policy change and it is therefore likely to be subject to change.

**Proposal**

That the Committee:

- a) Notes the content of the report and comments as appropriate on the work done to develop Primary School Improvement.
- b) Approves the working draft of Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan

**Reason for proposal**

To ensure that members have the latest information regarding the development of primary school improvement and are able to approve the working draft of Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan which was submitted to the DCSF on the 30 April 2010.

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## Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Children's Services Select Committee on the recent developments within primary school improvement and to present the latest version of the World Class Primary Plan for Wiltshire which was sent to the Department for Children Schools and Families on the 30 April 2010 (now the DfE).

## Background

2. The last Government's vision to make this the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up was articulated in the White Paper "Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system". Published in June 2009 it outlined a vision and set of ambitions, including that all primary schools should be World Class and recognised in policy that primary education is a key to securing success later in life. In December 2009, the former Secretary of State wrote to all Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services setting out a requirement for all Local Authorities to submit a World Class Primary Plan.
3. The minimum expected content of the plan was outlined in the letter. Particular emphasis needed to be placed on how the Local Authority will address the issues facing those schools that are below the Key Stage 2 floor target; in Ofsted categories; needing to maximise progression and those which have inconsistent results. The plan also needed to show how the Local Authority will support and enable 'good and great' schools to support the rest.
4. In developing the plan a number of key stakeholders have been involved including headteacher representatives of the Primary Heads Forum, School Improvement Partners and a number of school improvement officers, including Diocesan representatives. Since submitting the plan, no feedback has been received from the Department for Education and with emerging policy changes the status of the plan remains unclear.
5. A key part of the plan is the role of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) in supporting and validating a school's own self evaluation, ensuring that it is accurate, robust and evidence-based. Within the plan we have identified the role of the SIP and this includes:
  - Exploring with the headteacher and school leadership team including governors, the school's self evaluation so that the school can accurately evaluate how well it is serving its children and what it needs to do to improve.
  - Providing professional support, working alongside the headteacher to provide guidance and challenge in school improvement including the setting of suitably ambitious targets.
  - Ensuring that school performance data is used to evaluate progress of **all** children including those vulnerable to under-achievement.
  - Supporting governors to take the lead on headteacher performance management.

- Where appropriate, validating the school's judgements, through joint lesson observations, work scrutiny, discussions with children, staff, senior leadership team and governors.
- Agreeing with the headteacher and governors support to secure school improvement.

During March 2010, Wiltshire was invited as part of a national pilot project to become the regional lead for the development of the role of School Improvement Partners (SIP). Our work as part of this national programme will be considering the implications of how the SIPs will increasingly lead on the brokerage of support to schools in the future, including school to school support.

6. School to school support has been a developing feature of school improvement in recent years and current policy direction suggests that it will remain a key feature into the future. Within Wiltshire we have been creating opportunities and developing experience of this type of support. Examples can be seen across the breadth of school improvement activity and this includes teachers working together (individually and in cluster groups), leadership development programmes for school leaders, and two schools working together to secure whole school change, including amalgamations and federations. Included in our work within Wiltshire are a number of national programmes including the National Leaders of Education and National Support Schools, Local Leaders of Education and the development of Accredited School Providers.
7. A key support strategy within the plan is the Accredited School Provider strategy which was launched by the DCSF in late autumn 2009. The programme was intended to identify and accredit exceptional schools, who have the capacity to work in a formal partnership with other schools that will benefit from support. Since the change of government the future of this programme is unclear. It is possible that aspects of this programme will form part of the new Academies programme but it is too soon to know. In essence, the original Accredited School programme involved a longer term partnership or federation with partner schools, through sharing vision, values, policy, practice and staff in order that the recipient school/s can accelerate their improvement. Under the Accredited School programme one primary school had expressed an interest in the pilot programme.
8. Work is ongoing in relation to the development of school to school partnership working, amalgamations, federations and collaborative working. A consultant has been working with interested schools to undertake research in relation to best practice and to work in support of schools. Further work is planned through term six with a view to reporting activity to the working group at the end of the term.

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

9. The opening pages of the plan set out the vision and values for school improvement in Wiltshire. The vision identifies that, "we want children to be part of a **dynamic learning society** in which **autonomous schools** work in **partnership to engage, inspire, enable and include all learners**:"

- encouraging a **love of learning**,
- establishing **strong partnerships**,
- reinforcing that **every child matters**,
- creating confident, **effective leaders**,
- developing **learning communities**,
- promoting the **highest aspirations**.”

Underpinning the vision is the recognition of school autonomy, the central role of the school’s own self evaluation, support which is tailored appropriately and the role of high quality partnerships in school improvement. The plan also identifies a number of themes or components which are part of the drive to support and secure improvement across Wiltshire, including narrowing the gaps in achievement and continuing to raise standards for all pupils.

10. It is recognised that there are a number of keys to school improvement which should be present in all schools and used by the Headteacher and School Improvement Partner (SIP) as a focus to support self evaluation. These keys include:

- the School Improvement Cycle
- a single plan for improving achievement
- a focus on improving teaching and learning
- the ability to track pupil progress and
- regular discussion about pupil progress, through pupil progress meetings.

The plan identifies the importance of senior leaders and governors along with the SIP considering a wide range of information and data on the school in order to form a ‘rounded’ view of the school’s strengths and areas for improvement relation to a range of benchmarked information and data, much provided by the Local Authority.

11. Through the process of self evaluation, schools form judgements about their performance against criteria. Within Wiltshire’s plan the framework for forming those judgements is against the Ofsted criteria. We have suggested the sub-division of satisfactory judgement, recognising that some schools may be satisfactory with good capacity to improve, while others may be satisfactory with satisfactory capacity to improve. This subtle difference helps to identify and then determine the tailoring of support to ensure the school is able to bring improvement at an appropriate pace. The plan therefore recommends the use of five categories for self evaluation; inadequate, satisfactory with satisfactory capacity to improve, satisfactory with good capacity to improve, good, or outstanding. The original letter from the Secretary of State recommended that a focus for forming a judgement about a school’s performance should be the end of Key Stage 2 assessments. Contributors to the plan felt that use of the recommended categories would limit the view of the school, especially those schools with small cohorts of pupils as this could potentially lead to a limited or misleading picture. As a consequence we rejected the DCSF categories and have set the Wiltshire framework against the five categories listed above.

12. Included within the plan is a summary profile of the universal and differentiated support. The portfolio of support is based on the current range of strategies and programmes available. Over the coming months it is likely that this range of support is likely to change in line with government policy, national and local programmes and the available resources.
13. The plan also outlines the governance framework within the Local Authority for monitoring its work with schools. Members review the impact of this strategy. The plan also sets out how work is undertaken with our highest risk schools, which is reviewed by Members.
14. The Local Authority (LA) works extensively with the three Diocese of Salisbury, Clifton and Bristol in supporting and enabling improvement in both Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Schools. Recently a very successful day was held with officers of the Salisbury Diocese as we shared strategies and developments and considered how we could work more closely to support schools where we share responsibility. Further events and work are being planned in the future.
15. The plan also sets out a range of success criteria, the majority of these are regularly reported impact measures as part of the National Indicator set. Our performance against the majority of these measures is tracked and reported through the School Performance Paper that is reported to this committee. The Department for Children Schools and Families in the development of the plan required that we submit some short term targets with immediate impact measures, hence the timescales identified within the plan.
16. Since the preparation and submission of the plan to the Department for Children Schools and Families the government has changed and we are now working with the Department for Education. With no feedback to date and significant changes in emerging policy it is likely that the plan will need to be updated and changed once the full scope of policy and funding change is understood. However, in the meantime we will continue to work within this framework.

### **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

17. At this stage there is no specific or known environmental impact as a result of the development of Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan. The development of the strategy within the plan is designed in order to minimise environmental impact, for example the increased use of information technology to reduce travel.

### **Risk Assessment**

16. At the point of developing the plan it was designed to be delivered within known and available resources and within the existing policy framework. However since early May 2010 the policy framework has begun to change in relation to the new government's policy development. Potential changes in funding also present a risk to the delivery of the plan.

## **Financial Implications**

- 17 As identified within the risk section of this report the Wiltshire World Class Primary plan was developed in line with known financial resources. Since submitting the plan new policy direction suggests that the available resource will change significantly. At the time of preparing this paper those changes are not known and therefore the risks are not clearly understood. One risk is a significant move of our current outstanding schools to Academy status by September 2010, which could reduce the overall number of community schools and their funding, thus reducing the overall availability of funding to support school improvement activity for all schools. It is also likely that the funding of specific grants may be lost, thereby reducing the availability of specific support strategies.
- 18 Once the financial reductions are known further risk assessments will be undertaken.

## **Legal Implications**

- 19 The plan currently enables the authority to meet its statutory duties and responsibilities. As changes in the law occur the plan will need to be reviewed and updated.

## **Conclusion**

- 20 Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan sets out our current primary strategy, including our vision and values, for securing continuous improvement within primary education. The plan was required by the previous government, although it does capture our current best practice and has allowed us in partnership with schools and other stakeholders to agree a direction for the future (within the policy framework at the time). With a new government and emerging policy change it is likely that we will need to review and update the plan over the coming months.

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Unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Wiltshire's World Class Primary Plan