Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

15 January 2025

Education Performance Outcomes Rapid Scrutiny

Purpose of the Report

1. To present to the Children's Select Committee ("the committee") the findings and recommendations from the rapid scrutiny exercise undertaken on Education Performance Outcome trend data.

Membership

2. Cllr Jon Hubbard (lead), Cllr Caroline Corbin and Cllr Martin Smith.

Terms of Reference

3. The aim of the rapid scrutiny was:

   To understand in more depth the performance figures for primary school outcomes, as well as identifying trends and outliers, to inform how the committee will consider education performance outcomes going forward.

Background

4. At its meeting on 12 March 2024, the committee considered an Education Performance Outcomes report for ages 5 to 19 in the academic year 2022-2023. At the committee, members stated that they were keen to consider how longer-term trend data could be presented in future reports, something that was agreed by officers.

5. The report identified that, although performance was relatively strong in Early Years and Key Stage 4 there were challenges in Key Stage 2, particularly in maths. The committee, therefore, requested further information about Year 6 performance, to help them to make their recommendations about how the information should be reported.

6. When organising the rapid scrutiny, education officers suggested that it may be useful to extend the review to all performance data in primary schools.

Meeting

7. There was a single meeting held on Wednesday 11 December 2024.

8. The rapid scrutiny members were grateful to the following officers for their attendance and the information they provided at the meeting:

   o Kathryn Davies - Director Education and Skills
   o Louise Lewis – Head of School Effectiveness
   o Charlotte Gilbert – Assessment Adviser in School Effectiveness
   o Kate Wilkins – School Effectiveness with responsibility for Disadvantaged Learners
   o Lesley Lowe – School Improvement Lead
   o John Spring – Head of Targeted Education and Virtual School Headteacher
   o Paul Holdsworth – EEIA, Virtual Schools SEC – Targeted Education

9. Members of the rapid scrutiny exercise, thereafter, referred to as "members", received a comprehensive presentation to provide them with a clearer picture of performance in Wiltshire's primary schools.

Findings

How Educational Outcomes are Measured

10. Members were informed that pupils undergo several statutory rounds of testing in core subjects through their primary school education. In preparation for the rapid scrutiny exercise, members were provided with background reading about the different types of assessment explaining that:

    o Within the first **six weeks** of entering school children undergo a Reception Baseline Assessment recorded by their teachers.
    o At the end of **Reception**, teachers then assess pupils' level of development in seven different areas to build an Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
    o In **Year 1** pupils' understanding of phonics and reading is assessed. Pupils that do not meet the expected threshold in phonics retake the test in Year 2.
    o In **Year 4**, pupils take an online Multiplication Tables Check
    o At the end of **Key Stage 2**, pupils take SATs in grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS), reading and maths, as well as being teacher assessed for writing and science.

How to Interpret the Results

11. Members were made aware of the incomplete nature of the data available to the Local Authority. For example, the results of the Reception Baseline Assessment and Year 4 Multiplication Tables Check are not automatically shared with Wiltshire Council. The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the data between 2020 and 2022.

12. Until the 2023-24 academic year, it was a statutory requirement to take SATs at the end of Key Stage 1. It is now optional whether schools want their pupils to take these tests. This is a significant change, as progress scores for pupils at Key Stage 2 are calculated using Key Stage 1 SATs but this will not be possible in most cases after the current Year 4 and Year 5 leave primary education. Pupils will eventually be measured from Early Years Foundation Stage starting points.

13. A further challenge in interpreting the data is that each of the statutory tests adopt different marking and recording systems to ensure that they are age appropriate.

Headlines

14. Members were presented with headline trend data that was compared to national, regional and statistical neighbours (where available). In line with the report received by the committee on 12 March 2024, they saw that overall performance in Wiltshire was not too dissimilar from national average. There was slightly stronger performance in the Early Years and later in Key Stage 4, but with a decline in performance at Key Stage 2 where there was a performance dip, particularly in maths.

15. There had been a pleasing improvement in phonics in Wiltshire over recent years and performance in writing and reading remained steady. Areas of focus included grammar, punctuation and spelling, where there was a larger gap with the national average than in reading and writing at Key Stage 2 SATs.

16. Data was gathered from all schools, so it would be possible to compare performance in specific geographical areas, or in schools with particularly high numbers of vulnerable pupils, to the county average. For example, there were relatively high concentrations of Disadvantaged Learners in Chippenham, Trowbridge and Salisbury. As Wiltshire was a rural county, it was emphasised that statistics from certain geographical areas could be heavily impacted by a few pupils in smaller schools.

17. It was clarified that Disadvantaged Learners, the largest group of vulnerable pupils, were in receipt of Pupil Premium or Pupil Premium 6 (those pupils who are in receipt of free school meals or have been within the last six

years). As with other pupils, there had been a pleasing improvement in phonics. The gap between the percentage of Disadvantaged Learners and non-Disadvantaged Learners achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage had also reduced, so progress was being made in this area. However, the gap in performance in Key Stage 2 for all subjects with non-Disadvantaged Learners had increased between 2021/22 and 2023/24 and remained a key area of focus.

18. Children at the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support Level are those with additional needs that do not require an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Children in Wiltshire at the SEN Support Level were performing less well than the national average for children at the SEN Support Level. However, SEN pupils with an EHCP in Wiltshire were performing at a similar level to their counterparts, with an EHCP, nationally.

19. Children Looked After in Wiltshire had better outcomes, and a lower rate of absenteeism, than the regional and national averages. No Child Looked After had been permanently excluded from a Wiltshire School within the last five years.

20. It was explained that Children in Need were those requiring extra support or services to help them to maintain 'a reasonable standard of health or development'. They had a social worker and either a Child Protection Plan or a Child in Need Plan. The combined scores for these pupils in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 had had shown significant progress. It was noted that here were challenges in tracking the group as they were a relatively fluid cohort; data is taken from the census.

21. There was stronger performance in academies than maintained schools for pupils at Early Years Foundation Stage. However, by Key Stage 2, although academies were performing better in writing, they were performing slightly less well than maintained schools in reading and maths.

22. In response to queries from members about the impact of ending the mandatory requirement to complete Key Stage 1 SATs tests on monitoring pupils' progress, it was confirmed that a new measure would be introduced by the Department for Education stretching from entry to the completion of primary school.

23. The persistent, total and unauthorised absence rates in Wiltshire were improving and better than the national average. There had been an increase in the number of severe absences, but this was in line with national trends. Disadvantaged Learner performance was closely linked to overall absence data and significant resources had been focussed upon this area.

24. Reassurances were provided to members that pupils with a high level of unauthorised absence were offered support, and an attendance pathway was put in place to help identify the reasons why they were not attending. Data recording had improved to allow absences for pupils receiving reduced education provision to be specifically tracked, rather than being recorded in

the overall authorised absences data.

Conclusions

25. It should be noted that the focus of the rapid scrutiny exercise was not to conduct an in-depth statistical analysis of the Education Performance Outcomes, but to focus on selecting the information that was most relevant to be presented at committee level and the best format in which it could be presented.

26. Members emphasised that the starting principle for the report was that it should be aimed at a general audience so that trend data was displayed in a way that was accessible and clearly identified areas of strength and concern. It was important to have brief background information about the different tests were assessed, as well as clear definitions of the different categories of young people.

27. Consistency of presentation was identified as very important. It was highlighted that laying out tables in as similar a way as possible, to put gaps and percentages in context, would be beneficial. Furthermore, the use of red, amber, green (RAG) ratings and up and down arrows were seen as useful visual aids that could add clarity. Graphs were also viewed as a useful accompaniment to, but not replacement for, raw data.

28. The limitations of the data were recognised, including factors such as the turnover and categorisation of pupils, recent pandemic, different reporting requirements for schools and the end to the mandatory Key Stage 1 SATs. In order to monitor how pupils were comparing to national and regional trends, it was felt that it would be useful, if possible, to track the progress of some anonymised cohorts of slightly above and below average performing groups through their school years so that a consistent group were being monitored.

29. Members noted that Ofsted's framework saw the performance of Disadvantaged Learners as a barometer of success for whole subject areas. Therefore, they were particularly keen to see the relative performance of different groups of young people over time. Breaking down the figures in this way would not only allow the committee to see gaps in outcomes for different cohorts but to better understand how they impacted average performance. Including overall numbers, as well as percentages, was felt to be important contextual information.

30. Members were keen to learn how many pupils fell into multiple categories to add additional context to the data and to receive assurances that there was enough support and understanding of individual needs. If possible, the felt that it would be handy to have a Venn diagram to show the overlap between the groups.

31. In addition, they were keen to know how summer born children, with delayed entry to school, were assessed in the Reception Baseline Assessment and how children being taught in classes outside of their age group were presented in the figures.

32. A comparison between trends in performance of maintained primary schools and academies, in Key Stage 2 SATs, was seen as important inclusion given the slight variation in outcomes between different subjects.

33. It was recognised that including the relative performance of schools categorised by Ofsted gradings would be challenging in future given the plans to end single word gradings.

34. Members were keen to see the correlation between absences and achievements, particularly for vulnerable cohorts. It was also noted that school absence data comes to the committee through regular school improvement updates.

Recommendations

The Children's Select Committee are asked to approve the following recommendations to develop the Education Performance Report (with the aim of enhancing understanding and scrutiny of educational performance data):

Recommendation 1 – The report displays trend data in an accessible way that does not need specialist knowledge to understand.

Recommendation 2 – The report illustrates clearly how the results from disadvantaged groups relate to average performance and how many pupils fall within multiple groups.

Recommendation 3 – The structure of the report, if possible, is amended to include the following:

- o **an overall RAG rating from officers on the first page for the different types of assessment criteria, Key Stages and vulnerable groups, so it is easy to identify the areas that need careful monitoring.**
- o **sections covering the different types of assessment within each Key Stage. Each section would include a summary page (scorecard) including the key points to bring to the Committee's attention from the data.**
- o **brief background information about of how assessments are carried out, to be included on the summary page.**
- o **graphs showing the difference between academy and maintained schools for SATs.**
- o **to show progress of anonymised cohorts of slightly above and below average performance though their school years is tracked so that consistent groups of children are being monitored.**
- o **to clarify whether references to pupils receiving Pupil Premium includes Pupil Premium Plus.**

- o information about how delayed entry (summer born) students, and those being held back a year, are reflected in the data.
- o figures for the number of students receiving reduced education provision should be included.

Recommendation 4 – The presentation of the report is made more accessible and includes the following:

- o clear definitions for different categories of pupils and acronyms, (Disadvantaged Learners, Children in Need, Children Looked After, Special Educational Needs, English as Additional Language, Previously Children Looked After etc.,).
- o commonality in formatting of tables in each section as possible (e.g., the Wiltshire figures in the left-hand column of all tables and the regional figure in the central column).
- o shaded columns to make them easier to read.
- o green (good) and red (bad) arrows alongside tables to make it clear whether deviations from the national and regional averages are positive.
- o the inclusion of graphs, in addition to the raw data, to show trends.
- o a glossary of terms at the end of the report (this could also be attached to all future reports).

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Lead) – Education Performance Outcomes Rapid Scrutiny

Report Dated: 3 January 2024

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