

<b>12 March 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Overview of Responsibilities of Portfolio holder for Education report</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr Adam Carter, Cabinet Member for Education	
<b>This report is:</b> Public	

## Overview

**This report gives an overview of the work that has been undertaken within the municipal year within education and skills which is part of children’s services.**

**EDUCATION & SKILLS – Supporting our children, young people and adults to achieve positive learning and skills outcomes.**

### School Effectiveness Team

There are over 30,000 school-aged children living in Thurrock. They are served well by the 39 Primary Schools, 13 Secondary Schools, 1 Alternative Provision and 3 Special Schools that operate across the borough.

Orsett Heath Academy is due to open in its new purpose-built premises in September 2024, providing secondary school places and ensuring we are meeting our statutory duty to ensure all children have a school place.

90% of schools in Thurrock are judged by Ofsted to be good or better, (95% of Primary Schools & 76% of secondary schools).

There were 20 Ofsted inspections of schools in the last calendar year, 2 schools were inspected for the first time, and both achieved a good Ofsted rating, 2 further schools retained their outstanding judgement, the remaining schools also retained their previous judgement.

Two of the secondary schools that are Requires Improvement/ inadequate will be joining a new multi-academy trust in April 2024, as a result of the Regional Director’s brokerage. It is hoped that the new multi-academy trust, will have the capacity to rapidly improve both schools.

In 2023 43% of young people achieved 9-5 English and Maths GCSEs compared to 45% nationally and 63% achieved 9-4 GSCE compared to 65% nationally.

In Year 6, end of Key Stage 2 62% achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined, compared to 60% nationally.

At the end of reception, 70% of children achieved a good level of development compared to 67% nationally.

It should also be noted that a significantly higher proportion of Children in Thurrock with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and those who are Looked After by Thurrock, achieved the expected standard than their peers nationally.

### **Holiday, Activity & Food (HAF) Programme**

HAF clubs were delivered throughout Easter, summer and Christmas holidays for school-aged children who are eligible for free school meals through means tested benefits. On average, 20 clubs were held over each holiday period offering a vast range of activities for children to take part in; e.g art, drama, music, sports of all types, wellbeing, Special needs etc. They delivered healthy meals and activities, family information and advice and signposting to other services. Over 2000 family packs were distributed to help families stay active and receive support. The places are funded by grants from DfE.

### **Early Years**

The School Effectiveness Early Years Team is working closely to deliver training to all Early Years Providers to support them to further develop their knowledge and skills around addressing speech, language and communications difficulties and delay. The team, funded by the Family Hubs Home Learning Environment, is directly working with practitioners, families and children to improve speech and language development outcomes for children identified as having a need.

The latest published data (2022) shows that 74% of our most vulnerable two-year-olds benefitted from funded early education and childcare, which is in line with national data. The data also shows that 87% of our three and four-year-olds benefitted from funded early education and childcare.

92% of our Early Years Providers are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. The settings that are not good have not engaged with our School Effectiveness Team who deliver the statutory responsibility of the council around delivering support and advice to settings to improve. As a result, we are offering settings where Ofsted ratings have dropped further advice and support.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

In December 2023 Thurrock maintained 2294 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with SEND. These plans set out what the children's needs, aspirations and intended outcomes are and what provision must be in place to meet them.

In line with legislation, EHCPs must be issued within 20 weeks. The latest available published data shows that in 2021 in England, 59.9% of EHCPs were issued on time. However, in 2023, Thurrock issued 89% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks.

SEND Post 16 service is enhancing its post 16 provision by working with training providers to deliver the best possible offer to our SEND young people and its quality assurance – the service is actively working with the young people to enable provision to meet the young people's needs.

The SEND Service is in the process of reviewing and updating its strategy in coproduction with health, social care, college, schools and settings, children and young people and their families as well as a range of other professionals. This should be ready in draft form in Spring 2024 and will align with the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper as well as the revised Joint Area Inspection Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Framework for Inspection.

The Assistant Director for Education and Skills, SEND Heads of Service, Finance Head of Service and PQBI Head of Service have been working with DfE and their partners Newtons to participate in the Delivering Better Value Programme. This work has been ongoing since August and aims to identify the causes for the demands on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Once identified the service is able to bid for a grant to help to reduce the demand on the HNB DSG. The grant application is in process, and we are hopeful it will be successful. The grant will be used to support the schools in Thurrock to be even more inclusive.

### **School Attendance Support Team (SAST) (previously known as Education Welfare Service)**

In May 2022 the Government published new guidance for Councils, *Working together to improve school attendance*. This guidance came into effect from September 2022 and sets out clearly the expectations and responsibilities of parents, schools, governing bodies and the local authority and partners to increase levels of school attendance. The guidance requires all Local Authorities to rigorously track local attendance data, have a SAST which provides expert advice in respect of attendance matters, share good practice, hold termly conversations with all schools in respect of pupils identified as persistent or severely absent. The service has set out clear attendance management processes for schools to follow to ensure that barriers to good attendance are identified, explore multi-disciplinary support for families and monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker.

In addition to the attendance advisory work the SAST fulfil the local authority's statutory duties in respect of Elective Home Education (EHE). Contact is made with each new EHE case to establish the reasons for EHE and to ensure that a plan for a suitable education is in place. Cases found to be suitable are reviewed every 12 months. Cases are reviewed sooner if there is a need. Cases known to social care or those with an EHCP are given

highest priority. Statutory action such as School Attendance Orders are used if there is a need to return a child to school.

In this current academic year there are currently 345 children or young people recorded as EHE. This academic year alone a further 66 children have been returned to school.

The service also issues child performance licenses, chaperone licenses and child employment licenses on behalf of the Council.

1199 Penalty notices were issued in 2023 to parents of children with poor attendance or those who took term time holidays. These are as a result of a referral from schools to issue a penalty notice. 108 cases went further to prosecution because the penalty notices went unpaid.

## **The Virtual School**

The Virtual School continues to monitor and support the educational progress and outcomes for Children/Young People Looked After (C/YP LA) irrespective of where they are placed, in or out of borough. The responsibility covers pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this includes those who have left care during an academic year. It is also required to provide information, advice and guidance to Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and their families when requested.

At the end of the academic year 22/23, there was 322 pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School. This was more than in the previous year. During the academic year, 37 pupils left care and 83 entered care. 39 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entered care during this academic year and in total there were 66 UASC. This equates to 20% of the cohort, which was an increase of 9% from the previous year.

In June 2021 the Department for Education published non-statutory guidance which extends the role of the Virtual School Head to promote improved educational outcomes for Children with a social worker aged 0-18 years. Grant funding of £100,000 per year has been provided to support these extra duties and this has been committed by the Department for Education until 2025. The bulk of this funding is used for 1.5 extra staff members who are leading on the implementation of supporting and challenging schools and social care to improve the educational outcomes for this group. A variety of data is now being collected and analysed which looks at areas for improvement for this cohort of children and young people. We have maintained our commitment to the provision of training and inclusion resources for those schools requesting it as well as providing social care with training and advice to promote better educational outcomes.

## **Inspire Employability & Skills**

Inspire Employability & Skills Services are enhancing the work with young people by focusing on developing the skills young people needed to progress into the world of work.

Employability and Skills team have successfully delivered on the ONTRACK and CLLD ESF funded programmes by delivering bespoke and one to one support for those young people and adults who are furthest removed from employment. Both programmes were part funded through the European Social Fund and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions. ONTRACK was a 2.5-year programme worth £3.7m to Thurrock which engaged with 815 young people aged 15-25 who were able to benefit from the range of support on offer. CLLD programme was specifically designed to deliver similar work to 203 adults in Tilbury area.

In partnership with Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) Employability and Skills Team are engaging with Career Coordinators in schools and Employability Advisers (EAs) from industry to improve delivery of careers strategy to the schools, i.e., bringing the world of education closer to the world of work. 18 secondary schools and colleges in Thurrock are engaging in the project.

Successful partnership with Make Happen is providing valuable resource to work with the most vulnerable young people to progress them to Higher Education (HE), focusing on Care Leavers.

Inspire Employability and Skills Team are further developing partnerships with Thurrock secondary schools by providing Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in 9 out of the 15 schools.

September Guarantee 2023 stands at 100% ensuring that every 16-year-old had a place of learning reserved for them in September 2022. September Guarantee 2024 is on the same trajectory.

Grangewaters – the team have enhanced our SEND offer at Grangewaters: young people with SEND access Grangewaters for a range of training sessions getting them ready for the world of work and preparing them for adulthood. New SEND schools have come on board, whilst one to one tuition has been explored and enhanced.

## **Thurrock Adult Community College**

Thurrock Council's Adult Learning Service, Thurrock Adult Community College, provides learning opportunities that improve people's lives and outcomes, enable people to participate in their communities and support growth and prosperity in Thurrock.

The college reaches approximately 1400 adults across Thurrock each academic year.

Leaders and managers have designed and planned a broad curriculum offer with the intent to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviors that learners need to take advantage of the considerable opportunities for employment both within Thurrock and in the surrounding areas. The offer includes maths, English and ESOL from complete beginners to level 2, vocational qualifications plus workshops and short courses to support with wellbeing, confidence building and engagement back in to learning.

The work of the college remains key to meeting elements of key council strategies including the Backing Thurrock Skills Plan, the Brighter Futures strategy, Think Family and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The skills agenda remains a key focus.

In May this year the college underwent a full Ofsted inspection which resulted in a grading of “Requires Improvement”. Inspectors recognised that leaders and managers were aware of the areas for improvement, had plans in place to address these but had insufficient time to demonstrate impact.

As a result of inspection feedback, leaders and Governors made the strategic decision to cease apprenticeship training provision for the Council’s Business Administration Level 3 apprentices. Apprentices were transferred to South Essex College from 1 September 2023 and the college continued to support 5 apprentices who were close to their End Point Assessment.

In the summer the college moved from its temporary location in South Essex College to a new home in the Old Court House. This has resulted in positive feedback from both learners and staff.

## **Home to School Travel Assistance**

### **Restructure of Children’s Home to School Travel Service**

Further to the restructure of Home to School Travel Service the assessment of mainstream transport eligibility is in the process of moving to Children’s Services as this will allow complete oversight of budgets.

### **Home to School Travel Policy Update**

The policy and Post 16 statement is in the process of being reviewed and will be updated to reflect changes to the Department for Education Statutory Guidance published in June 2023.

A consultation on the proposed changes commenced on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and closes on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, this allows for a full 28-day statutory consultation to be adhered to as required by law.

A report will be presented to Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in March 2024 for decision. It is proposed that parents will be required to contribute towards the cost of SEN Post 16 transport as there is no statutory duty to provide this free of charge.

## **Home to School Travel Contract**

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Cabinet approved a one-year extension to the current framework which ends on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024. Following this decision work has taken place between the

service and procurement to look at all options for a new contract to commence early in 2024. On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Cabinet approved for the Council to collaborate with Essex County Council (ECC) on a procurement exercise for a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) and to undertake further competition via the DPS to award contracts for Children's home to school transport. The DPS will allow for new operators to join the contract as any point during its lifecycle, therefore providing capacity to deliver transport contracts whilst obtaining best value.

## **Free School Programme and School Expansion**

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that every child in Thurrock has a school place. We continue to achieve this with strong working relationships with our schools.

Orsett Health Academy is on track to open in their permanent location for September 2024. The school will be opening their full pupil admission number of 240 places in year 7.

The new Harrier Primary School, part of the REACh2 Academy Trust has been delayed due to the main contractor delivering the school on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) went into administration. The DfE are in the process of procuring a new main contractor with a view to the school opening for September 2025.

In relation to pupil place planning, we are in the process of compiling the next pupil place plan which will include forecasts from 2024-2028.

## **SEN Provision in Thurrock**

This year we have developed a further primary resource base for 10 pupils with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) at Deneholm Primary with a further primary resource base for 10 pupils due to open at Arthur Bugler Primary in September 2024. These additional resource bases follow the additional 10 places developed at Stifford Clays Primary School and 10 places at Aveley Primary school both of which became fully operational last academic year. The development of mainstream resource bases is part of our SEND strategy of ensuring that children with SEND have excellent opportunities to have their needs met within high quality school provision within the borough. These resource bases have been developed to meet the significantly increasing population of children with complex needs resulting from SEND.

Following on from the increasing demand for specialist places in the Primary phase, there is a subsequent need for additional specialist places for pupils with complex needs places in the Secondary phase of education. We are in the process of consulting with secondary schools to create a Secondary Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) to enable the pupils from the primary bases to continue their education within Thurrock.

We have worked alongside Olive Academies Trust to support the application for a new Free School Alternative Provision Academy in Thurrock for pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs who require specialist provision to enable them to access a full curriculum offer and maintain opportunities to access mainstream schooling. We are currently awaiting the outcome of this process.

The Local Authority has in place 233 Specialist Mainstream Resource Bases for pupils with SEND in 2023/24 and this will rise to 253 places in 2024/25 with the development of further Primary and Secondary provision for pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition.

The Local Authority has 540 school places across our three special schools in Thurrock meeting the needs of pupils with highly complex special educational and disability needs.

### **Access and Inclusion**

We have continued the process of holding 3 weekly Primary and Secondary Inclusion Panels for all schools within the Local Authority. These panels ensure that the Fair Access Protocols are appropriately implemented ensuring that pupils who come under this, who are often particularly vulnerable, get access to a school placement in a timely manner with a fair distribution of these pupils across all schools in Thurrock. All schools in Thurrock have continued to engage positively in this process.

The Inclusion Panels also facilitate the process of managed moves for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion to avoid where possible the need for this and enable a fresh start at a new school. The Panels also oversee the reintegration of pupils who have been previously excluded back into mainstream provision from our Alternative Provision.

There have been 42 permanent exclusions from Thurrock Schools during the academic year 2022/23. In addition, there have been 2 Thurrock pupils permanently excluded from out of borough schools. Exclusions from schools outside Thurrock attended by pupils living in Thurrock do not appear in these statistics however it is Thurrock's responsibility to provide full-time suitable education for these pupils.

Thurrock has 16 places for Primary aged children who are at risk of or who have been permanently excluded from school provided by Osborne Academy Trust via two inclusion bases at two separate primary schools.

Thurrock has 85 places for Secondary aged children who are at risk of or who have been permanently excluded from school provided by Olive Academy Trust at the Olive AP Academy in Thurrock.

### **Dedicated Schools Grant**

Nationally, all local authorities and the education system have struggled to meet the additional demand for payments in support of children with Education Health and Care plans (EHCP); for out of borough placements, independent special school residential placements and for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) top up payments.

The high needs block remained a significant issue for Thurrock, with year-on-year increase in EHCP's. This has required both additional top up funding to be paid to Schools and Academies and an increase in demand for specialist placements.

The DSG has a carried forward deficit into 2023/24 of £0.534m. This is a decrease of £3.512m from 2018/19. Increasing the local offer and reducing the increase in EHCP's

are seen as the key areas to deliver a sustainable budget. This is supported by work with the DfE in the SEND Delivering Better Value programme.

## Conclusion

This report highlights the work that has been undertaken over the past year, relating to education and skills. The teams have worked hard to ensure that all children young people and adults can access good quality teaching opportunities which lead to sustainable pathways.

## Appendix:

### Education Portfolio Budget

Education Portfolio	2023/24 Indicative Budget £'000	2024/25 Indicative Budget £'000
Dedicated Schools Budget	51,754	61,696
Education and Skills	5,215	4,503
School Transport	4,336	4,702
<b>Education Total</b>	<b>61,305</b>	<b>70,901</b>
Dedicated Schools Grant	(51,754)	(61,696)
<b>Education Portfolio Total</b>	<b>9,551</b>	<b>9,205</b>

In determining the Education budget, the following levels of growth and savings have been applied, as reflected in the MTFS.

### Growth

Education Portfolio Growth	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
DSG – CSSB 20% Reduction	135	105
Home to School Transport	1,243	799
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>904</b>

### Home to School Transport

Thurrock continues to experience yearly increase in pupil numbers and Education Health and Care Plans. The increase to the Local Offer for pupil with Special Education Needs, places additional demands on the Home to School Transport budget. This is a recognised national issue.

### Dedicated Schools Grant – Central School Services Block 20% reduction

The element of funding received for historic commitments made prior to 2013/14 is subject to a 20% year-on- year reduction. Funding is provided to minimise the impact of this reduction in funding. This allows Education budgets to be reviewed as part of the Council’s budget reduction proposals.

## Savings

The following savings have been identified within Education for the period 2022/23 to 2025/26:

<b>Savings Narrative</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>	<b>2024/25 £'000</b>	<b>2025/26 £'000</b>	<b>Total £'000</b>
Review of Education Services	1,010	126	599		1,735
Cessation of Council provided Nursery Provision	64	46			110
Cross Cutting			145		145
Review of Home to School Transport	146		432	132	710
	<b>1,220</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>1,175</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>2,699</b>