



School Improvement Strategy

2013 - 2014

Draft June 2013

Introduction

Context

Few small unitary authorities are as well poised as Thurrock to provide diverse employment and cultural opportunities for its growing population. Massive inward investment in its deep water container ports will transform Thurrock into a global hub for logistics and transport and provide job opportunities at all levels for its residents. At the same time, the existing developments in retail will expand and others emerge. The third part of this regeneration will be the growth of world class creative industries at the production park shared by the Royal Opera House, National Skills Academy Creative and Cultural and ACME Studios.

Alongside these developments is the relocation and rebuilding of the Thurrock campus of the Essex-wide further education college to the centre of Grays and the setting up or reconfiguration of a number of new schools, both academies and free. As is noted in the Children's Plan, Thurrock has a relatively young population with roughly a third of its residents under the age of 19 and a group of 0 – 4 year olds larger than comparator authorities. An increased number of jobs, more affordable housing than the adjacent outer London boroughs, and the impact of recent changes to benefits are also attracting a new and more diverse population.

The challenge for Thurrock is to be ambitious for the future and to be able to harness these developments to 'create a great place for learning and opportunity' as advocated in its Corporate Strategy. Indeed, this is the top priority for the borough, expressed as 'If our young people are not able to access the professional and managerial jobs and opportunities arising from the regeneration programme then we will have failed.' Although there are significant strengths and successes, systemic and historic barriers remain. This school improvement strategy identifies the challenges and key issues, outlines the vision and sets out the ways in which the local authority is addressing them to enable children and young people to reap maximum benefit.

Challenges

Over the past 3 years, the gap with national attainment levels at Early Years Foundation Stage has disappeared and the levels at Key Stage 1 met or exceeded. At Key Stage 2, the improvement trend has overtaken the rate for national but there is still a gap of 2.6%. At GCSE, outcomes have plateaued with results slightly above those of maintained schools nationally but below for all schools. There have been encouraging developments in reducing the gap with regards to those entitled to free school meals, especially at Key Stage 2, but there is more to do for groups of pupils with special needs and in relation to gender equality. Currently, Black and minority ethnic groups perform well overall by comparison with those of White British background.

There is need, in addition, to minimise variation amongst schools as well as by comparison with statistical neighbours and nationally. Although the number of schools below the floor standard has reduced to 4 at primary and 2 at secondary, there is still an unacceptably large gap between the highest and lowest performing at both phases. The variable levels of performance are evident in Ofsted judgements where Thurrock primary schools were deemed by HMCI to have amongst the lowest numbers of pupils in schools judged 'good' or better.

School attendance is a key focus for the Schools Standards and Progress Board meetings where individual school attendance is scrutinised and strategies to support improvement are agreed as part of the overall school improvement function supported by the Education Welfare Service. Overall absence for primary age children has decreased from 5.5% to 4.7% over the past three years, as has persistent absence.. For secondary age pupils there has been a decrease in overall absence from 6.5% to 6.0%, reducing to within 0.1% of the national average. However, persistent absence rates have fluctuated and increased again in 2012.. Links between the Education Welfare and School Improvement Officers have become more clearly focused since 2011 in relation to how attendance affects pupil outcomes*.

In the eight years since the launch of Thames Gateway, the percentage of those Thurrock residents obtaining higher level qualifications i.e. at Level 4+ has started to rise but there remains a gap of 10% with the England average. In addition, the 2011 Census identified significant gaps between the percentage of those employed in knowledge economy jobs locally and the percentage of those in the East of England region and nationally. At age 19, the percentage of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications has increased by 5% to within 2% national average in 2012. The picture for Level 3 has also improved but the gap is a more challenging 6%. The most recent data for university entrance (2011) shows that only 49.4% young people in post-16 provision in Thurrock progressed to higher education..

In common with many areas that have experienced post industrial decline, Thurrock has had a period of low aspiration and achievement. The opportunities opened up by the recent multi-billion pound inward investment have left its population without the qualifications needed to capture jobs that range from entry to post-graduate levels. Raising awareness in schools and colleges, and among parents and carers, of these local opportunities and the necessary progression pathways is a first step; challenging pervasive gender stereotypes is another.

Thurrock is only 25 miles from London, and increasingly well connected, but has a very different feel. One of the greatest challenges to raising achievement overall is to attract and retain a stable, high quality teaching workforce and leaders for its schools. Despite the range of low cost housing, the lack of an Outer London allowance for staff working in Thurrock has proved a barrier at all levels of post. This has resulted in a greater provision of Teaching Schools and School Direct than would be anticipated for an area of its size but the flow of new staff will not fulfil all needs for some time.

Turbulence in the leadership of our educational institutions has been and continues to be a feature. In the past 5 years alone, some thirty new headteachers have been

appointed; and at one time, Thurrock had the highest percentage of interim and acting headteachers of primary schools across the country. Following a period of stability, there is evidence of movement as well-established leaders retiring or moving on. Innovative and successful solutions are being sought.

A final challenge is the impact of funding constraints on a small authority and the policy shifts enshrined in the 2010 White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' have combined to reduce the school improvement infrastructure to a small core.

Strategic Leadership of School Improvement

Vision

At the core is the aspiration to ensure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to learn effectively and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding so they are able to make informed choices about their futures from a range of options. This range will be at its widest when children succeed in their schools and are provided with the ambition, resilience and opportunity to optimise their learning within and beyond the school. The vision will most likely be realised if the following criteria are met:

- All Thurrock's children have the best possible start in life to enable them to progress successfully in their education
- Parents and carers engage positively in their children's education
- Children and young people, and particularly those who are vulnerable, have access to high quality education in schools and settings that are judged 'good' or better and that generate the ambition to be the best they can possibly be
- An appetite for learning for its own sake throughout life is fostered in all schools and settings
- Thurrock becomes an attractive and successful place to train and develop teachers and leaders of effective schools and settings, and to retain them
- The local authority continues to consolidate and refine its role in the brokering and commissioning of excellent school to school, structural and other improvement support
- Standards in schools and settings exceed national averages across all phases by 2016
- Every child and young person in Thurrock has a cultural entitlement, delivered in partnership with the Music Service, the Royal Opera House and the National Skills Academy
- Young people in every school or alternative provider benefit from expert careers education and guidance that helps them to aspire to the highest possible level of qualification to enable them to succeed in their chosen progression pathway
- All schools share and develop best practice in teaching and learning

- Successful local providers are prioritised in sponsoring new or vulnerable institutions
- Strong and effective governance continues to be developed across all school structures

Principles

Our work is underpinned by the following key principles:

- Schools are self-managing and autonomous institutions, working within a national context. They are responsible for their own performance and improvement. The role of Thurrock local authority is to commission or broker support for schools and to intervene should provision and high quality outcomes for children and young people be compromised.
- Schools will be supported and challenged to continue and sustain improvement, both in attainment and in the rate of progress of our children and young people.
- Learning must be personalised, and partners will work together to narrow the attainment gap for all pupils and particularly for the most vulnerable.
- All pupils must have the support they need to overcome any barriers to their learning and well-being and to achieve the highest possible standards.
- Young people in Thurrock aged 14 – 19 will have access to the widest range of opportunities and guidance in order to meet their interests, aspirations and needs and to be able to benefit from the growth in the area.

Identification and Intervention

Thurrock has a robust approach to school and setting improvement. All schools are tiered according to the annual analysis of Ofsted outcomes. Support and challenge is delivered via a programme employing Thurrock Improvement Consultants (TICs), School Improvement Officers (SIOs), Early Education Improvement Officers (EEIOs), Early Years Improvement Team and a variety of commissioned advisers offering bespoke services.

Notes of Visit from TICs, SIOs, EEIOs and external partners chart the progress towards targeted intervention outcomes for schools and academies, settings, and LA priorities. Schools are fully consulted about outcomes of all visits, reviews and funding agreements (SLAs) and sign them off before they are held centrally

The Standards and Progress Board meets half termly to discuss all schools of concern and any emerging issues on a more holistic basis e.g. finance, attendance, staffing. Progress towards actions identified in the bespoke plans for each school is discussed and noted. Appropriate action is then taken to address any further needs and resources allocated. It is a very flexible system that responds rapidly to changing needs within our schools.

Every member of the School Improvement (SI) core staff and all commissioned external providers are conversant with Thurrock's comprehensive data pack. The

use of this and individual school's data to continue to drive achievement is essential and debated at all school improvement meetings.

Yearly data analysis provides the basis upon which the priorities for the LA and its community of schools are made. Early autumn TIC visits are commissioned to ensure that the school's own improvement planning is focused and feeds into the governors' headteacher performance management process.

Through the data analysis and narrative that schools receive each summer, priorities are highlighted and targeted support and training is put in place.

Early Years (0-5) outcomes and provision remain a priority for the LA. Communication, speech and language development and outcomes have been consistently below those of other LAs. In recognition of that fact, we have retained 3 full time Early Education Improvement Officers (EEIOs) and 3 FTE Early Improvement Officers (EIOs). Systems and processes are in place to ensure that early intervention is in place, leadership and management developed within settings and there is joint working across Council departments and external partners. The recent need to increase provision for 2 year olds has continued the drive for excellent settings, child minders and children centres.

The LA effectively identifies, intervenes and uses formal powers in schools where necessary. It uses the Ofsted categories to identify the appropriate level of support and intervention.

Category	Support and/or intervention
Tier 1 Special Measures; Serious Weaknesses - Ofsted Grade 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEB or Progress Board set up • Post-inspection Action Plan formulated • Intensive support from TIC, NLE/LLE and SIO • Other support as appropriate e.g. for governance
Tier 2 Requires Improvement or (previously) Satisfactory – Ofsted Grade 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning Notice, Progress Board or Additional Governors provided • Post-inspection Action Plan formulated • Range of additional support as above
Tier 3 Good – Ofsted Grade 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to move to outstanding • Range of additional support where required • Discussion re deployment of staff to support other schools
Tier 4 Outstanding -Ofsted Grade 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to maintain outstanding

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion of school-to-school support or sponsoring opportunities and deployment of staff to support other schools |
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The full range of formal interventions in place in a number of targeted schools include:

- removal of leadership
- formal removal of the governing body and instigation of IEBs
- supporting IEB to shadow governing body prior to full governing body
- removal of delegated powers
- Warning Notice

(and Progress Boards - see Governance)

Partnership working

System leadership across Thurrock is well developed and is manifested in a number of initiatives. The LA works with two local authorities, Southend and Essex, in a joint plan to address leadership, management and succession planning in our schools. Joint protocols – tailored to the needs of each LA – have been produced, consulted on and shared with schools. This has resulted in an appropriate and refocused school to school support programme in partnership with the LA.

A range of programmes is already in place and will be further developed:

- deployment of LLEs to support RI schools
- application of DfE funding of LLEs to support vulnerable schools
- deployment of NLEs to support category and RI schools
- secondment of senior leaders to support other schools
- delivery of leadership and management programmes through National College
- delivery of a variety of training programmes through the Thurrock Teaching School Alliance (set up in June 2012 in advance of the other Teaching Schools).
- successful recruitment of SLEs and ASTs in primary and secondary and deployment in schools where identification has been made
- conference delivery for all three LAs on Leadership and Management, Deputy Head development and growing middle leaders

There are now 4 Teaching Schools in Thurrock and several providers of School Direct places all of which will contribute to providing the high quality teachers needed to address the challenge of recruitment in Thurrock.

The LA engages with a number of schools and academies to ensure that the profile of recruitment and retention of teaching and senior staff remains high. Schools Direct has been a focus for 4 schools in the LA. This has resulted in successful DfE bids and recruitment of a number of graduates in primary, secondary and special schools. Partnerships with various providers have been established including Canterbury University and University of East London (UEL). Local delivery of the training

programmes to support graduates has been commissioned through the Teaching School Alliance.

The authority will continue to seek innovative approaches to recruit teachers to the borough's schools e.g. with TimePlan by the provision of housing.

Support for School Improvement

Whilst the focus has been on school improvement, the wider influence and involvement of all Children's Services teams continues to be sought. Intelligence is shared across teams through alerts, visit notes and meetings, all of which enable a clearer understanding of barriers to raising achievement and also deployment of focused support. Such initiatives incorporate:

- reviews of governance by the Governor Development Officer to support challenge on Pupil Premium impact, attendance, achievement, SEN
- reviews of SEN by the specialist team to support inclusion, equality and access
- audits of Safeguarding and e-Safety involving the LADO and e-Safety Data officer
- audits of BME provision and attainment to support inclusion, equality and access, particularly in the light of Thurrock's changing demography
- project to improve GRT school attendance and engagement at KS2/3 transition to reduce EHE numbers
- joint discussions and protocols developed between SIT and Admissions re Behaviour for Learning strategy
- joint discussions and interventions between SIT and EWS resulting in improved attendance in a number of schools
- protocols and timetable developed between SIT and Finance to support Consistent Financial Reporting and changes in leadership within schools
- rigorous monitoring by Finance of all budgets and spending related to SIT and how this is targeting school improvement and raising achievement

Governance

Governor development is a high priority within the LA and nationally. The links with school improvement and other education services are increasingly strong.

Strengthening governance and interventions

Progress Boards: The DfE guidance on Schools causing concern encourages LAs to use their statutory powers to intervene in schools where a school requires significant improvement.

This can take the form of providing additional governors or issuing a Warning Notice. The latter can lead to the formation of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) if the terms of

the Warning Notice are not met in a specified time. The LA must apply to the DfE to obtain ministerial approval for the membership of an IEB.

For schools in a category, there is the option of an IEB, with a further requirement that this leads to sponsored academy status. It is otherwise impossible to make significant changes to or remove the governing body in a timely fashion unless a Warning Notice has already been issued as above or other serious breaches of control or breakdown within the school have taken place.

For a number of schools that are;

- below floor standard
- judged as 'Requiring Improvement' but not in a category
- needing to improve accountability and accelerate the rate of improvement
- any of the above while awaiting agreed academisation but with some time to go/no agreed sponsor

A Progress Board provides an easily set up, non-statutory and effective means of improving the performance both of the SLT and the governing body.

It serves as a kind of sub-committee of the existing governing body, focusing solely on the progress of whatever improvement plan is in place including, where relevant, seeking amendments to that plan and extra or alternative resource to enhance its implementation. The addition of new LA governors alone will not guarantee this.

In Thurrock, Progress Boards have been introduced into a number of schools in all the above categories. Both DfE and HMI have commended their introduction as part of the LA's spectrum of support. A group of expert governors, usually Chairs, and successful Headteachers, both within Thurrock and in Essex, are supporting schools in this way. Progress Board meetings are usually held on a 3 weekly cycle to ensure momentum.

Interim Executive Boards (IEBs): replace the entire governing body with, ideally, three new members and a parent. There are 2 examples in Thurrock at present. In addition, we have a number of schools with Additional Governors to strengthen the governor body.

All strong interventions rely on a pool of governors able to commit additional time. We recruit experienced governors and headteachers to this pool using an application process and by direct approach, offering training, support and advice. All IEB and PB meetings are internally clerked to give consistency and professional support. The Director of Children's Services and the Strategic Lead hold a termly review of Progress Boards' work and their evaluation of the impact of LA intervention.