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| <b>26 March 2014</b>                     | <b>ITEM: 14(ii)</b> |
| <b>Council</b>                           |                     |
| <b>Cabinet Member Report – Education</b> |                     |
| <b>Report of:</b> Councillor John Kent   |                     |
| This report is public.                   |                     |

## **Introduction**

I am delighted to present my first report as portfolio holder for education. The council's top priority is to make Thurrock a great place for learning and opportunity and over the past year the foundations have been laid to make a step change in achieving this. The year started with my pledge to visit every school and academy before the end of the school year and I am well on my way to achieving this. I have been welcomed into every school and academy and have come away with a strong collective sense of the collective ambition that now exists in our schools.

## **Education Commission**

The year started with the Education Summit at High House Production Park in March, an event which launched the beginning of the Education Commission. It was attended by almost every head teacher and principal in Thurrock. The Commission was set up by the council – with cross party support - as an independent health check to give us a review of strengths and areas for development in education. It was led by experts, Christine Gilbert, former head of OFSTED and now Professor of Education at the Institute of Education in London and Robert Hill, an academic researcher at Kings College London.

Christine Gilbert and Robert Hill gathered evidence over the course of six months to determine what could be done to accelerate progress even further in our schools, particularly our primary schools. We knew that 88% of our secondary schools and academies were judged good or outstanding. We knew that our primary schools had improved significantly from 33% being judged good or outstanding in 2010 to over 60% in 2013. But we wanted to know whether there were significant barriers which needed to be addressed in order to make maximum progress quickly.

I asked for a warts and all report and I got one. The report, backed by all political parties, made six recommendations which form the basis of an action plan which is now being put into practice and which will drive improvements. Firstly the Commission noted the need to bring all involved in education together to stand behind a shared vision, with a pride in what has been achieved and a shared ambition for achieving even more. Headteachers and governors have been working with officers in a well-attended series of conferences to develop a joint and

compelling vision in a shared ambition and achievement strategy. Feedback from these conferences has been very positive about the shared ambition to work together as a community and drive an ambitious agenda.

The Commission noted the changing role of the local authority in a national context of a drive to increase the number of free schools and academies and recommended that this role is understood and agreed by all. Officers are currently drawing together a clear document which sets out clearly the new role of the local authority and how this will be delivered.

A new board, the Thurrock Education Alliance – a strong partnership of key leaders in education in Thurrock - has had its first meeting, in line with the Commission's recommendations. The role of the board is to be the accountable partnership body for education improvement in Thurrock.

The third recommendation, growing the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve, has been proceeding apace. Thurrock is very fortunate in having three schools designated as Teaching schools, Beacon Hill academy, Harris Academy and Dilkes Academy. These are schools which have been nationally recognised and accredited to be able to support other schools to improve. Working in alliance with other strong partners the schools have been working with the council to put together a strong programme of support for schools. The Teaching schools alliances have been working closely with officers to ensure this offer is taken up by schools.

The fourth recommendation concerned the recruitment and retention of the best teachers and leaders by establishing greater pride in Thurrock. The development of a cultural entitlement strategy working with prestigious partners such as the Royal Opera House and the Back Stage centre in Purfleet as well as a number of nationally recognised arts organisations is being rolled out and 19 schools have signed up to be part of the pathfinder this year. Engagement in the arts is now flourishing in Thurrock schools with unprecedented opportunities on our doorstep and a strong partnership with arts organisations which is going from strength to strength.

The fifth recommendation concerned governor development. The crucial role of governors in driving forward improvement in schools is well known. I was delighted to see so many governors listening avidly and giving up their Saturday morning a couple of weeks ago at High House Production Park, where the annual governors' conference was held. It was a well-attended and well received event with governors from maintained schools and academies coming together to develop their skills in holding schools to account. Governor training has developed extensively this year with most schools buying into the Governor development service. A number of schools have had the skills of their governing bodies strengthened through the introduction of what is known as a "progress board", an additional complement of experts who work alongside existing governors to increase progress and hold schools to account. OFSTED have commented favourably on their use.

The final recommendation was to recognise and celebrate education and achievements in Thurrock. I am pleased to announce the inaugural Thurrock Teaching Awards which will be held in November this year. There has been a high degree of support for the awards which will recognise the achievements of teachers, headteachers and principals across Thurrock. Officers are busy planning the event with schools. It promises to be a showcase of the best of teaching in Thurrock and I am anticipating it will become an eagerly anticipated event. Alongside the teaching awards officers are working on showcasing best practice in our schools by creating a dedicated website.

The Education Commission has been a major achievement this year and lays the foundations for a step change in achievement in Thurrock. While the recommendations will not be implemented overnight, the actions falling out of the report are proceeding at pace. There is now a strong sense of shared purpose and a desire to make change happen as I go around schools. The recent focussed OFSTED inspections in Thurrock where OFSTED conducted a number of inspections in a week - have shown that most schools inspected have strong leadership that will drive through improvements and secure good OFSTED judgements in the not too distant future for those that are not yet judged good.

I am delighted that the council's Education Commission has already had an impact in bringing together the education community in a joint set of goals and ambitions. I note that a local authority on our doorstep has decided to launch its own Education Commission and I commend the idea to them.

### **Educational Attainment**

In the early years and foundation stage and at key stage 1 attainment in Thurrock reached broadly national averages. At Key stage 2 attainment at level 4 in Reading, Writing and Maths improved by 1% and closed the gap on the national performance at 72%. This is a focus for improvement this year so that Thurrock schools are on a trajectory to exceed national averages. Progress in reading and writing was better than the national average and 1% behind in maths.

Results this year saw a slight increase in the number of pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths and a significant increase in the number taking the English Baccalaureate or EBacc, one of the government's newer benchmarks for attainment. Attainment in Thurrock was an average 59.5% attaining 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths compared with a national average of 59.2%.

### **Pupil place planning and school building**

The last year has also seen the publication of the second pupil place plan. The first plan set out for the very first time, transparently and clearly the pattern of demand for school places and the take up of those places across the borough. The second annual plan has been widely consulted on and has been well received by headteachers and governors. Local authorities nationally are faced with the challenge of expanding the number of places quickly to meet the demands of a rising population. Our pupil place plan has enabled us to forecast the number of places required more accurately than ever before.

Over the past two years the council has created over 1200 school places to meet the needs of our growing population. The pupil place plan published in early 2013 set out the areas where additional capacity needed to be added to the school estate and officers have been busy working with schools to ensure these are built. Bonnygate school is receiving an additional form of entry to meet the demand locally and Graham James is receiving an additional two forms of entry as well as a 52 place nursery. Little Thurrock is expanding to three forms of entry and Purfleet and Quarry Hill are undergoing similar expansions to meet the future need for places. A new primary free school is being built by the Harris group, fully supported by the council with additional capacity to support the future demand in the West Grays planning area as well as the Chafford Hundred vicinity. These are much needed places for local children and are planned in tandem with housing developments.

The last year has also seen the completion of a new Skills Centre at the Hathaway Academy, started when it was Grays Arts and Media College. The centre boasts state of the art, industry standard kitchens for young people to train in. Alongside the brand new building for Ormiston Park Academy which opened in the autumn term, the council funded a new build resource base for children and young people with additional needs. I visited the academy building just after it opened and it is an inspiring place in which to learn.

Plans are being progressed to relocate the Pupil Referral Unit from its existing site at the Culver Centre to a new modular building in Tilbury. This will give a fresh new building for our young people and ensure they get a good teaching and learning environment to continue their education. Nationally the educational attainment of pupils at the PRU lags behind their peers who remain in mainstream education, but we are ambitious for our young people and they need good facilities in which to achieve qualifications and life skills.

### **Thurrock Adult Community College**

At the beginning of the municipal year the Thurrock Adult Community College was praised by OFSTED for the quality of its education. It improved its previous satisfactory rating to be judged *Good* by OFSTED in March 2013. Ofsted inspectors noted particular strengths in a wide range of areas in mathematics, English, ICT, family learning and courses in English for speakers of other languages. It was noted that learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. The College is currently working with Intu Lakeside on its work to improve literacy in Thurrock, in partnership with the National Literacy Trust.

### **Young People Not in Education or Training (NEET)**

The key annual monitoring period has closed and officers exceeded the targets set with 5.4% of young people aged 16-19 now NEET, a significant reduction on last year. The tracking of young people has been particularly successful and Thurrock has the lowest rates of young people unknown to the service in the country. This work continues, particularly through the Diversity in Apprenticeships Programme that targets looked after young people and other groups who are at an increased risk of being NEET.

## **Conclusion**

There has been much to celebrate this year in Thurrock's schools and colleges. There is also an increased understanding of what more needs to be done to help Thurrock pupils achieve the highest levels of attainment. The Education Commission has given the borough a strong launch pad on which to base further ambitious plans for our children and young people. Council will hear more over the next few months as plans roll out and come to fruition. It is clear that improving attainment, a clear focus amongst all education partners of improving the numbers of schools which are good or outstanding, a reduction in young people who are not in education, employment or training are all important achievements and the provision of more school places is vital to achieving this.