

## **COMMITTEE: FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**DATE: 26<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022**

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### **The Impact of the School Improvement Team**

Report of: Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson, Lead Member - Children's Services

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#### **Purpose of Report**

This report is provided to committee members to:

- Highlight the work and impact of the School Improvement Team.

#### **Recommendations**

Committee is recommended to:

1. Review the performance of the team over time via this report and the PowerPoint in Appendix One.
2. Comment on the team's ability to develop the quality of education in Northumberland.
3. Give further direction to the team as they continue to operate.
4. Note the changes to funding imposed by the DfE and the possible impact on the service.
5. Note that a further report will be presented to update members once we know how the reduced funding will be accounted for.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to have access to the things you need; 'connecting'.
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential; 'learning'.

#### **Key Issues**

School Improvement has revolutionised over the last 6 years. What was an ineffective partner in the sector, without the respect and confidence of the schools and Ofsted has become central to the improvements seen across the county. All school leaders now look to the School Improvement Team for support and guidance with ongoing development, particularly in times of challenge. Ofsted sees the team as professional equals valuing opinions and relying on them to guide toward appropriate judgements. Almost all maintained schools now purchase the School Improvement SLA and many Academies also purchase and value the service.

In January 2022 the Department for Education (DfE) announced the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant – a grant designed to enable councils to fulfil their core school improvement activities, with the amount received by each council proportionate to the number

of maintained schools in their area. The grant has been cut by 50% for the financial year 2022 – 2023 and removed entirely from April 2023.

In 2020-21 the grant received was £388,910. Over time this grant has enabled the team to subsidise the true cost of school improvement activities, by about 50%, to all schools engaged in the SLA and training.

### **Background**

In October 2013 Ofsted undertook a focused inspection of Northumberland schools. The report concluded, “*the local authority is not well placed to provide an accurate and up-to-date view of each school’s performance and the progress made by pupils,*”

The school improvement service was remodelled in 2014. At that time, many schools in Northumberland were not well prepared for their own Ofsted inspection and needed external support. Too many schools were receiving poor Ofsted outcomes. Too many Northumberland pupils were not achieving their potential. In the last 6 years the school improvement service has impacted positively on all these areas, particularly in the first/primary sector.

### **The Current Team**

In 2022 the School Improvement team looks very different, is well respected and makes a difference in Northumberland. The team consists of 7 full time staff, including an administrator. All of the School Improvement Leaders have experience of headship across a range of ages, phases and localities. Two of the team are training as Ofsted inspectors, all have wide Ofsted experience. The central team are supported by 20 School Improvement Partners, (who work between 6 and 24 days per year) all of whom are experienced educators.

The School Improvement Team work to support all the 12 Education & Skills priorities, in particular priorities 2, 6 and 7. (Appendix 2)

### **Support Provided to Schools in 2021 – 2022**

118 of Northumberland’s schools utilise the support and challenge of a School Improvement Partner from the School Improvement Team. Only 2 maintained schools choose not to work directly with us. This support and challenge take place during termly school visits. Inciteful reports focussed on key

areas for development are shared with the Headteacher and Governors to ensure they have an external viewpoint regarding the quality of their school.

Over 100 schools use the team to support the Headteacher Performance Management cycle.

Over 80 teachers are being supported through the induction process in their first years of teaching.

Over 140 schools use the team to provide moderation and assessment support.

The team has continued the rollout of training in conjunction with the Education Endowment Foundation and Newcastle Research School, which began in 2020. This ensures that training is “evidence-based” - a key tenet of the recent White Paper.

An extensive training programme and multiple network meetings further support schools, leaders and teachers.

### **The Impact of the Team**

Ofsted have commented very favourably on the impact of the work the team undertakes with schools, describing the work as “honest and purposeful,” “focused support and challenge,” and “critical friendship.”

Schools hold the team in high regard, describing their work as “The best training, I have ever attended,” “I have been going around in circles for months and you sorted it within hours,” and “without the support of [a team member] I would have resigned months ago.”

In August 2017 76% of schools were judged good or better by Ofsted, 10% below the national average. In April 2022 88% of schools were judged good or better, 2% above the national average. Since January 2021 32 school inspections have taken place. All bar one has had a positive outcome.

All 16 monitoring visits to Inadequate/Requires improvement schools has been deemed to be “Taking Effective Action”. 11 schools have improved their Ofsted grade.

### **Future Inspection Activities**

The exemption for Outstanding schools has been lifted and so all will be inspected in the near future. It is vital that they can access the support of the School Improvement Team to help them prepare, as some have not been inspected for 10 years.

All schools are due to be inspected by July 2025. Again, the support of the School Improvement Team in helping them prepare is likely to mean better outcomes for Northumberland schools.

### **Next Steps**

- Expand the number of schools engaging with the School Improvement Team
- Further develop of consultancy work with other Local Authorities
- Work with the Director to establish the School Improvement Function in any potential MAT
- Build upon success and continue to support schools to improve Corporate KPIs at headline level
- Increase the team members undertaking Ofsted Inspector training
- Secure the finances to at least maintain the capacity of the team

### **Conclusion**

- a. The School Improvement Team are skilled, experienced and have a track record of improving outcomes and supporting schools.
- b. School leaders are very pleased with the service they receive.
- c. Training is focussed on needs, evidence-based and well received by recipients.

- d. The challenge and support provided to schools is being acted upon by school leaders.
- e. Ofsted gradings are at their highest on record.
- f. The future cuts in funding will need to be managed carefully to ensure the service remains as effective.

Through their close working with schools the School Improvement Team can provide an accurate and up to date view of performance of schools, and support and challenge to continue the improvement journey.

The quality of education in Northumberland and our Ofsted outcomes have improved dramatically under the guidance of the current School Improvement Team. This is because the service has enabled schools to correctly identify their strength and weaknesses and how to develop them. Any reduction in the capacity of this team will lead to poorer Ofsted outcomes and a lower quality school offer to the residents of Northumberland.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	The actions set out in this report support the vision and values of the Council's Corporate Plan.  All DFE/ESFA policies and guidance are reviewed, interpreted and shared.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The reduction and subsequent removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant may lead to budget pressure and a request for additional funding in order to maintain the service. A further report will be provided to members once we are clear how any shortfall will be accounted for.
<b>Legal</b>	Northumberland County Council has statutory responsibilities with schools and academies as well as colleges and post 16 providers. The statutory responsibilities are clearly defined within policy and priorities for Education and Skills; within specific officer roles and also within the Education Strategy Board structures that engage with schools and academies and wider stakeholders to engage and to assure all that statutory duties are met. Formal reporting routines are embedded across the corporate calendar to ensure oversight and decision making is clear.
<b>Procurement</b>	None
<b>Human Resources</b>	None
<b>Property</b>	None
<b>Equalities</b>	Not applicable
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Not applicable
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	The report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Service plans and systems are approached from the pupil/family/customer perspective. All learner facing approaches include the learner/ customer journey aim to improve satisfaction.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The increase in digital and remote learning as well as digital meeting spaces has significantly reduced the travel and carbon footprint in 2020/21.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Staff well-being is of high importance. Systems such as Kooth and Qwell are in place to support pupils and staff as well as bespoke arrangements to meet the needs of particular circumstances.
<b>Wards</b>	All aspects of the service support all wards in Northumberland

### **Report sign off**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Alison Elsdon
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Cath McEvoy-Carr on behalf of Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

### **Author and Contact Details**

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Appendix 1: [PowerPoint presentation](#)

**Appendix 2: Education and Skills Key Priorities**

- 1- We will take a key role in the strategic leadership of educational improvement in Education and Skills in Northumberland. Our vision will define the purpose and will ensure connectivity and inclusion to eradicate gaps. (Audrey Kingham)
- 2- We will know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers, challenge and support them to improve and report their performance to the Council and the community. (David Street)
- 3- We will lead the development of an overall strategy to ensure our residents and their families are able to access appropriate and inclusive provision in Northumberland that meets their needs as close to their homes as is possible. (Nicola Taylor)
- 4- We will develop an alternative education model which offers routes for children which support their future career choice; the model may also support keeping our children in education and provide a positive and financially viable contribution to our communities. (Sue Avison)
- 5- In partnership with all stakeholders, including education, health and social care, we will lead on the implementation of the Local Area 0-25 SEND Strategy to ensure learners with SEND achieve best outcomes. (Sam Baron)
- 6- We will work across the early years sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child. (David Street)
- 7- We will support all first and primary schools to ensure their pupils have all the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum. (David Street)
- 8- We will transform transition, progress and performance for our Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 and improve their access to their first choice University place, Further Education, Higher Apprenticeship and/or employment. (Dave Cookson)
- 9- We will work in partnership across services to ensure our children are supported through Social Care, Virtual school and Community Hub supporting their health and well-being (including mental health), feel safe, in touch, listened to and supported every week of the year and not just term time. (Sam Baron)
- 10- We will develop key relationships with education and industry to support careers ambition, curriculum development and routes into post 16 and Higher Education which support the economic priorities in Northumberland. (Neil Dorward)
- 11- We will develop a strategy and create an appropriate curriculum supporting the needs of all our young people and adults in Northumberland so that more can access suitable/appropriate/good fit apprenticeships, skills training and development to underpin careers, employment and in work progression. (Mick Burton)
- 12- We will work closely with Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council and North of Tyne Combined Authority to be innovative in our approaches and to be ground-breaking and leading the way in education for all our stakeholders. (Audrey Kingham)