



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 SEPTEMBER 23

Report of the School Improvement Team 2022 - 2023

Report of Audrey Kingham - Executive Director of Children, Young People & Education

Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

1. Purpose of report

To provide FACS with an overview and assurance as to the work related to school improvement undertaken by the School Improvement Team across Northumberland in the academic year 2022 – 2023.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- Review the performance of the team over time
- Comment on the team's ability to support and develop leadership in schools
- Give further direction to the team as they continue to operate
- Note the changes to funding imposed by the DfE

3. Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "Tackling Inequalities" priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan - in particular, "Children and young people have the best start in life and grow up well".

It is also relevant to the "Driving Economic Growth" priority as good education and improved school results will help our children and young people increase their outcomes and aspirations to become the future leaders and contributors to our economy.

4. Key issues

- School performance in Northumberland, as measured by Ofsted outcomes, is the highest it has ever been
- Key Stage 1 and 2 results in 2023 suggest that pupil performance in Northumberland is bouncing back
- The investment in the service by the local authority, in response to the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant, has meant that school improvement has remained a high priority across Northumberland and the team have continued to build on the successes of recent years.

5. Background

5.1 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,*”

5.2 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.

As of 31 July 2023, Ofsted outcomes are the highest they have ever been:

	Number of schools Good or better	Total schools	% Good or better	North East (12 LAs)¹	National Average²
First/Primary	119	123	96.7%	93%	90%
Middle/Secondary /High	26	30	86.7%	76%	81%
Special	8	10	80%	89%	89%
Total	153	163	93.8%	90%	88%

5.3 4 new schools have not received an inspection and so are not included in the data above. Those schools are:

- NCEA Grace Darling Church of England Primary School
- NCEA James Knott Church of England Primary School
- NCEA Thomas Bewick Church of England Primary School
- NCEA William Leech Church of England Primary School.

6. Current Team

6.1 The School Improvement team consists of 6 full time staff (A Head of School Improvement and 5 School Improvement Leaders), and a part time administrator. All of the team have experience of headship across a range of ages, phases and localities. Two of the team are practising Ofsted inspectors, and 1 is undertaking the training at present. The central team are supported by 18 School Improvement Partners, (who

¹ [State-funded school inspections and outcomes: management information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/state-funded-school-inspections-and-outcomes-management-information)

² [State-funded school inspections and outcomes: management information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/state-funded-school-inspections-and-outcomes-management-information)

work between 6 and 24 days per year) all of whom are experienced educators.

6.2 The School Improvement Team work to support all the 6 Education & Skills priorities, in particular priorities 1, 2 and 3. (see appendix 1)

6.3 The team work closely with the Church of England diocese. A number of schools have been supported through close partnership working between the two school improvement teams including Tritlington C of E First School, Norham St Ceolwulfs C of E First School and Whitley Chapel C of E First School.

6.4 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 was cut by 50% for the financial year 2022 – 2023 and removed entirely from April 2023. In 2020-21 the grant received was £388,910. This grant enabled the team to subsidise the true cost of school improvement activities to schools engaged in the school improvement SLA and training.

7. Support Provided to Schools in 2022 – 2023

7.1 112 (67%) of Northumberland's schools utilised the support and challenge of a School Improvement Partner from the School Improvement Team in 2022 - 2023. Only 1 maintained school chose not to work directly with us, and they have not done so for a number of years (they are a Church of England school and use a School Improvement Partner from the diocese).

7.2 The 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 provision at their school. Reports are stored securely and shared with Ofsted during inspections. Schools also have access at any time to the rest of the team to work on specific areas - this can range from middle leadership development to specifics around individual pupils.

7.3 We estimate that there have been over 1000 in person visits made to schools by the wider team in 2022 – 2023.

7.4 One specific area we have focused on is the mental health of headteachers. To that end we brokered the support of [Heads Up 4 HTs](#), a company specialising in the area. Feedback has been 100% positive with one headteacher calling it “career-saving”. This support has been provided free of charge to over 60 Northumberland headteachers in 2022 – 2023.

7.5 Over 100 schools used the team to support the Headteacher Appraisal cycle.

7.6 Over 50 teachers have been supported through the induction process in their first years of teaching. This element of our work will cease from September 2023 as the

DfE have stopped local authorities from acting as the Appropriate Body for Early Career Teachers; the role can now only be fulfilled by Teaching School Hubs³.

7.7 Over 140 schools used the team to provide moderation and assessment support at Key Stage 1 and 2.

7.8 Of the 53 schools inspected in the 2022 – 2023 academic year 38 had on site support during the inspection (as they purchase the SLA). This involved meeting the inspection team and providing our view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and attending feedback at the end of the process.

7.9 Team members began work in a Cumbrian school in 2022 and returned in the summer of 2023. We also have work planned with a North Tyneside school later this year.

7.10 The team has continued the rollout of training in conjunction with the Education Endowment Foundation and Newcastle Research School, which began in 2020. This relationship will develop in the new academic year as Town End Research School (Sunderland) have asked the team to work with them.

7.11 The team manage a [website](#) that provides support, advice and guidance for Northumberland schools. It has received over 51000 views in the academic year 2022 – 2023.

7.12 All new headteachers are invited to a 12-month induction programme. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. There have been 41 new headteachers since December 2021.

7.13 An extensive training programme and multiple networks further support schools, leaders and teachers. Networks include middle leadership, senior leaders, RE teachers, Pupil Premium Leaders, small school headteachers, and standardisation for year 2 and year 6 teachers. Over 1000 Northumberland school staff attended training delivered or brokered by the team in 2022 – 2023.

³ [Appropriate body reform and induction assessment - government consultation response \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

8. The impact of academisation

8.1 Northumberland has a mixed economy of maintained schools and multi-academy trusts. We work with all schools, engagement with academies and multi academy trusts varies depending on the philosophy of each trust. The table below shows the engagement with each MAT/standalone academy in the county:

Multi Academy Trust	Number of Northumberland schools in the trust	Schools that the Northumberland LA school Improvement team provide services to
Tyne Community Learning Trust	9	Highfield Middle, Ovingham Middle and Prudhoe Community High Schools
Three Rivers Learning Trust	9	None
Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust	8	None
Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust	8	None
Wise Academies	7	None
Pele Trust	6	Belsay Primary, Darras Hall Primary, Heddon St Andrews Primary, Ponteland Primary, Richard Coates CE Primary Schools
North East Learning Trust	3	None
Hadrian Learning Trust	2	None
Northern Education Trust	1	None
Good Shepherd Trust	1	None
Eden Academy Trust	1	None
Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust	1	None
Emmanuel Schools Foundation	1	None
Total	57	8

Standalone Academies	
Cramlington Village Primary	Have provided school improvement services since the school was set up
Berwick Academy	Providing school improvement services again from May 2023
Ponteland Community Primary Academy	Have provided school improvement services since 2014
Cramlington Learning Village	None

8.2 The tendency is for schools that join multi academy trusts to be expected to purchase school improvement services from the central services of that MAT. However, we are increasing our work with the Cheviot Learning Trust (a merger between Three Rivers Learning Trust and Tyne Community Learning Trust) as they have asked us to provide services to Chantry and Newminster Middle Schools from September 2023.

8.3 Whilst the 2022 White Paper⁴ has been shelved it is clear the DfE continue to promote become part of multi academy trusts. The DfE expect strong academy trusts to expand, and the continual erosion of funding to local authorities for school improvement activity is a clear indication of the direction of travel.

9. The Impact of the Team

9.1 All school leaders look to the School Improvement Team for support and guidance with ongoing development, particularly in times of challenge. Ofsted hold the team in high regard valuing their opinions and relying on them to guide inspectors toward appropriate judgements.

9.2 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.” Termly meetings with Ofsted are positive and robust.

9.3 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.
- In July 2023 93.8% of schools were judged good or better, 5.8% above the national average.

9.4 Ofsted have picked out a number of schools where the impact of the team is demonstrable:

9.5 At Tritlington First School Ofsted said, “Leaders benefit from strong and effective governance. The innovative school-based leadership and interim executive board have driven improvements, including in curriculum thinking”. Two members of the team have sat on the interim executive board for a number of years.

9.6 At Otterburn Primary School Ofsted said, “Leaders and governors have secured significant improvements in school”. A member of the team has acted as the Chair of Governors, and the interim headteacher was brokered by the service.

9.7 The team won the Leaders' Choice Award for Team of the Year at the Excellence Awards in November 2022.

⁴ [Opportunity for all - Strong schools with great teachers for your child \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101421/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child.pdf)

10. Future Inspection Activities

10.1 All schools are due to be inspected between May 2021 and July 2025. The School Improvement Team are fully focused on helping those schools not yet inspected, or due reinspection, prepare fully. We do this by focusing developing strong leadership, high quality teaching and robust school systems.

10.2 Of the 10 schools that are not yet "Good":

- 4 are academies, and 1 is in the process of converting
- 2 are local authority special schools
- 2 are local authority primary schools
- 1 is a local authority secondary school

11. Conclusion

1. The School Improvement Team are skilled, experienced and have a track record of supporting schools and improving outcomes
2. Feedback received indicates School leaders are very pleased with the service they receive
3. Training for school and setting staff is focussed on needs, evidence-based, and well received by recipients
4. The challenge and support provided to schools is being acted upon by school leaders as noted in following reports and increasing Ofsted outcomes
5. Ofsted gradings are at their highest on record. For the first time in memory there are no Inadequate secondary/high schools in the county.
6. Northumberland is expected to be one of the top performing local authorities in the northeast, in terms of Ofsted outcomes, once the data is published in October 2023.
7. The additional funding allocated to school improvement by the local authority to plug the gap left by the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant, has enabled the team to continue to support schools to improve the life chances of pupils, thus narrowing inequalities
8. 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.

12. Implications

Policy	<p>The actions set out in this report support the vision and values of the Council's Corporate Plan.</p> <p>All DFE/ESFA policies and guidance are reviewed, interpreted, and shared.</p>
Finance and value for money	All budgets and decisions conform to expected DFE/ESFA funding requirements.
Legal	<p>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.</p>
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities	Not applicable
Risk Assessment	Not applicable
Crime & Disorder	The report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Consideration	Service plans and systems are approached from the pupil/family/customer perspective. All pupil facing approaches include the pupil/customer journey aim to improve satisfaction.
Carbon reduction	The increase in online meetings has continued the reduction in travel and carbon footprint.
Health and Wellbeing	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.
Wards	The service supports all wards in Northumberland.

Background papers: Appendix 1: Education and Sills Priorities 23/24

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full Name of Officer
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	Stephen Gerrard
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education	Helen Paterson
Chief Executive	Audrey Kingham
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

Author and Contact Details

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APPENDIX 1

EDUCATION AND SKILLS PRIORITIES 23/24

1. Know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers and report their performance to the Council and the community.
2. Challenge and support improvement in the performance of our schools and settings so that all children and young people, including disadvantaged and SEND learners, achieve the best educational outcomes:
 - We will support across the early years sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child
 - We will support all first, primary and middle schools to ensure their pupils have the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum
 - We will support improved transition, progress and performance for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 to promote access for all learners to their first-choice destination
3. Improve the lived experience and outcomes for learners with SEND:
 - We will work in partnership with all stakeholders, including championing the voice of children, young people and their families, jointly working with Health and Social Care, to fully implement the Local Area 0-25 SEND Strategy
 - We will lead on the development of a fully inclusive education system
4. Develop the vocational education offer to provide clear pathways into apprenticeships, further education, higher education, and employment for all our young people and adults:
 - We will develop a curriculum and facilities which both supports the ambition of learners and links to the workforce requirements for Northumberland
 - We will build on key relationships between education & industry
 - We will produce clear guidance for schools and settings on what good careers advice looks like to ensure all young people are supported to achieve their aspirations.
5. Develop appropriate high quality educational provision that meets the needs of all children and young people as close to their home communities as possible:
 - We will strive to deliver the right number of places to meet all learner needs in the right place at the right time
6. Ensure the Education and Skills Service fulfils its statutory duties within the legislative framework (including the School Admissions Code, Exclusions, Attendance, Virtual School, School Organisational Regulations, Early Years Sufficiency and those relating to SEND):
 - We will meet our own statutory duties
 - We will further develop relationships with the Regional Director and Academy Trusts to ensure they adhere to their statutory duties whilst ensuring equality of access to education
 - The Local Authority will work closely with children, young people, their families, schools, settings and all other partners to deliver on these priorities.