



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Young People's Scrutiny Committee
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<u>Item</u>
7
<u>Public</u>

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Closing the Gap in educational outcomes - 2013

1. Summary

This report follows the previous report on overall outcomes for pupils in Shropshire which was presented to Scrutiny in December 2013. The report outlines actions taken, the improvements in the outcomes for children entitled to free school meals (FSM) and Shropshire's improved position nationally.

2. Recommendations

That Members accept the position as set out in the report.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

There is a risk to the life chances of vulnerable young people if they do not achieve well at school. There is also a risk to the economic and social well-being of Shropshire communities if disadvantaged pupils are not able to contribute as adults, both economically and socially. Shropshire's reputation for providing good quality education and outcomes for all young people could be at risk and leave the local authority, and its schools, vulnerable to a weaker outcome on inspection.

4. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for the Council.

5. Background

- 5.1 Overall outcomes for pupils in Shropshire over time have been above the national average. They have also been in line with, or more usually above, the average across the group of local authorities judged to be closest in terms of comparisons (the statistical neighbour group of 11 local authorities). Outcomes at each assessed stage broadly reflect this pattern for 2013, although the progress rates in mathematics between ages 7 and 11 and in English between 11 and 16 are just below the average for the statistical neighbour (SN) group.
- 5.2 Against this broadly positive background there have been elements of underperformance, particularly in relation to pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM). Entitlement to FSM is used nationally as an indicator of social and educational disadvantage.
- 5.3 The proportion of children entitled to FSM in Shropshire is lower than the national average (11.4% in Shropshire in 2013, compared to 18.3% nationally) and so the number in any one year group is small. This leads to year-on-year variability. Statistically, those areas with smaller proportions of pupils entitled to FSM often have larger gaps between the outcomes for pupils on FSM and their peers. The LAs in the SN group all have a low proportion of pupils entitled to FSM, because of the social and economic context of the areas they serve.
- 5.4 However, Shropshire's gap in performance has often been wider than the SN average, and has widened as pupils move from early years, through the primary and then secondary phases of education. In 2011 the gap on the key indicators widened from 20% in the early years, to 25% at Key Stage 2, to over 33% at Key Stage 4. Outcomes for pupils entitled to FSM in 2012 confirmed this picture, with key stage 2 results placing Shropshire above the SN average, but GCSE results at Key Stage 4 ranking Shropshire amongst the lowest in the SN group. A very sharp focus has therefore been taken on improving outcomes for pupils entitled to FSM. Although this work originally focused on **narrowing** the gap, it is now a national aim to **close** the gap.
- 5.5 Shropshire's focus therefore reflects a key national priority. Significant amounts of funding have been made available to schools through the pupil premium. In 2012/13 over £4m was allocated to Shropshire maintained schools, in 2013/14 this rose to over £6.5m. Amounts of funding per school vary significantly. In 2013/14 the smallest allocation to a maintained secondary school was over £20k and to a primary school was just under £2k. The largest allocation to a maintained secondary school was over £200k, and to a primary school was over £100k. These significant levels of funding are due to increase again in 2014/15 and bring with them high levels of accountability. Schools are required to report on the use and impact of pupil premium funding on their website and in all inspections Ofsted inspectors make a judgement on its effective use and impact.

- 5.6 In 2012 a cross party Task & Finish group of members was established in response to Shropshire's data, and the introduction of the pupil premium funding. The group scrutinised the issues related to the underperformance of pupils entitled to FSM in Shropshire and compared the outcomes for Shropshire pupils who were eligible for FSM with those from other local authorities, including statistical and regional neighbours. The group also compared outcomes between Shropshire schools, identified examples of good practice and where improvement was required. The final report of the Task & Finish Group to Safe & Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee is attached at Appendix A.
- 5.7 The report from the Task & Finish group confirmed that the overall gap between the achievement of pupils eligible for FSM and their peers widened as pupils progressed through each key stage of schooling. The report also identified that the pupil premium was used to support a very broad range of inclusive and targeted activities across primary and secondary schools. It confirmed that while these targeted interventions can be effective in narrowing the achievement gap they are no substitute for "quality-first teaching", that is the day-to-day high quality teaching that all pupils receive in their mainstream classes.
- 5.8 In response to the Task & Finish Group recommendations LA officers have increased the focus on closing the gap. All attached School Improvement Advisers have worked closely with their schools, scrutinising their data and challenging them on the use and impact of pupil premium. It has been a main focus regularly for headteacher, senior leader and governor briefings. It has also been a key focus in a range of targeted programmes, including the programme for schools that need to move from satisfactory/requires improvement to good. At the LA's invitation, Regional HMI have led sessions for headteachers and chairs of governors which also focussed on Shropshire's outcomes for pupils entitled to FSM.
- 5.9 In 2013 LA officers undertook work with senior officers from Worcestershire LA, which is in the same SN group and therefore has many similar issues to Shropshire. At Key Stage 2 in 2012 Shropshire's outcomes for children on FSM were better than Worcestershire's, with Shropshire being fifth in the SN group compared to ninth for Worcestershire. However, at Key Stage 4 Worcestershire was fifth compared to Shropshire's ranking of =10th. Both LAs felt that some joint work might be useful. The work confirmed the importance of having a clear strategic approach to narrowing the achievement gap to ensure that it is a consistently high priority for all schools and that there are clear lines of accountability for securing improvement at LA and school levels.
- 5.10 Through this work almost all of the recommendations of the Task & Finish group have been implemented. The Council, headteachers and

governors have increased the focus on the take-up of entitlement to FSM and on provision and outcomes for children entitled to FSM, including through appropriate intervention work. There has been an increased focus on sharing examples of good practice, including through sharing how schools are reporting on their websites. The LA's School Performance Monitoring (SPM) process has included a sharper focus on outcomes for children entitled to FSM, and schools receiving a medium or high level of challenge and support through the Education Improvement Service have received a higher level of scrutiny. Provision and outcomes for children entitled to FSM has had a much higher profile in Governors' meetings, including the meetings of the Shropshire Schools Governors Council (SSGC). The emerging Shropshire Learning Partnership has identified provision and outcomes for vulnerable groups as the second of three key priorities.

- 5.11 Work to develop further the collaboration between education, health and social care professionals continues to be a priority. The Family Solutions work and the Family First prototyping projects include a focus on the link between social disadvantage and educational outcomes. The Shropshire Children's Trust action plan includes a continued focus on narrowing the gap, although the main focusses are on ensuring provision for young people who are in danger of becoming a NEET (not in education, employment or training) and for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), some of whom will be entitled to FSM. The SEND reforms focus on the implementation of integrated education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and, for those pupils with SEND who are also entitled to FSM, these will improve collaboration between education, health and care professionals.
- 5.12 All of this work is focussed on improving the educational outcomes, and therefore the life-chances, for pupils entitled to FSM. In 2013 at key stage 2 the proportion of pupils entitled to FSM gaining level 4+ in reading, writing and in mathematics in Shropshire dipped from 62% in 2012 to 59%. This meant Shropshire dipped to just below mid table in comparison to the SN group. However, the gap in performance between pupils entitled to FSM and their peers dropped from 23% to 19%, and matched the national gap. The national ranking therefore improved from 95th to 75th (out of 151 LAs).
- 5.13 The picture at Key Stage 4, where the gap was largest, improved significantly in 2013. Almost 32% of pupils on FSM in Shropshire gained five or more A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, compared to 24% in 2012. The gap in performance between pupils entitled to FSM and their peers reduced from 37% in 2012 to 31% in 2013. Although outcomes remain below the national figure of 38%, and the gap in Shropshire remains larger than the national gap (27%) the improved performance moves Shropshire from 142nd to 106th in the national rankings. Importantly Shropshire has improved from the very low ranking (=) to mid-table (sixth) amongst the SN group.

- 5.14 These improved outcomes are reflected in Ofsted inspections of Shropshire's schools. Ofsted inspectors are required to make a judgement on whether schools are making effective use of the pupil premium to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Across over 40 primary and secondary school inspections between April and December 2013, all reports except one (where there were no eligible pupils) identified effective or very effective use of the pupil premium, reflecting the priority schools are placing on this area.
- 5.15 These improvements demonstrate that the increased focus on provision for pupils entitled to FSM, including through the recommendations of the cross party Task & Finish group, have had an impact, particularly where improvement was most needed at Key Stage 4. Given year-on-year variability in this data, and Shropshire's continued commitment to ensuring the best provision and outcomes for vulnerable children, it is important that these improvements are built on further and sustained across all phases of education, including through:
- continuing to embed the recommendations of the Task & Finish group
 - maintaining the focus on support for potentially disadvantaged children who would currently be identified as entitled to FSM, whilst implementing the universal FSM scheme at key Stage 1
 - continuing to develop the collaboration between education, health and care professionals in relation to vulnerable children.

6. Additional Information

None

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p>
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<p>Final Report of the Narrowing the Gap (NTG) Task and Finish Group, Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee, 5 December 2012</p>
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<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</p>

<p>Ann Hartley</p>

<p>Local Member</p>

<p>All</p>

<p>Appendices</p>

<p>Appendix A: Final Report of the Narrowing the Gap (NTG) Task and Finish Group, Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee, 5 December 2012</p>
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