

My ref: AL/LB
Your ref:

Date: 27 April 2016

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Dear Andrew

Concern about the quality of education and the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in Cambridgeshire schools

Further to our recent conversation, I am writing to reassure you that the Local Authority shares your concerns about the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in Cambridgeshire and about the higher than average proportion of secondary and primary schools that require improvement or that are inadequate.

Accelerating the achievement of vulnerable groups across the age range is a key priority for the Local Authority and we are pleased that you acknowledge that strategies are in place to bring about improvement. We are confident that the actions being taken will have an impact but it is clear that many of the issues we are addressing are complex and interrelated. You mention Teach First and we would welcome the opening of access to schemes such as this as Cambridgeshire is currently not eligible. The Local Authority will continue to facilitate 'Teach in Cambridgeshire' recruitment support for schools, which is school-led and school funded.

You acknowledge that all except one secondary schools in Cambridgeshire are now academies and you note the responsibilities of the Regional Schools Commissioner. At its meeting on Tuesday 22nd March, Full Council voted unanimously to send a letter, copy attached, to the Parliamentary Education Select Committee in support of their view that the scrutiny of academy schools is confused, fragmented and lacks transparency and that a fundamental reassessment of accountability and oversight of schools is necessary. Whilst Government considers the Education Select Committee's conclusions we propose to work with the RSC in developing a set of proposals that maximise the support and challenge we could offer.

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We will continue to monitor the performance of academies and raise concerns with the Regional Schools Commissioner where appropriate. Work is already underway to revise the Council's protocol for dealing with failing academies in a more proactive way. We will promote good practice where it exists through our encouragement of school to school support; through the work of the Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board; and at county-wide conferences. For example, The Netherhall School presented at the LA's Vulnerable Groups Conference in February, following their positive monitoring visit in the autumn term. We are pleased that you acknowledge the improvements in the 2015 GCSE results for attainment. Further, RAISEonline shows that in 2015, progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 (in both English and Maths) was significantly above the national level for most groups of pupils except FSM / Disadvantaged. Whilst there is no room for complacency we consider these improvements to be positive indicators.

For maintained schools, we will continue to support as well as challenge. Disadvantaged groups were the focus of individual school reviews last summer term. Schools identified appropriate actions and these have been monitored over the course of the year. A good practice guide on the use of pupil premium has been published and governing bodies have been encouraged to appoint a pupil premium champion; almost all have done so. This is an encouraging indicator of the extent to which the issue of improving the attainment of disadvantaged schools is owned by schools. I get no sense of complacency or acceptance of current performance levels from schools. A comprehensive programme of briefings and training opportunities has been provided to primary schools and academies with a high level of buy back and very positive evaluations. In 2015 at KS2, disadvantaged groups improved by four percentage points, narrowing the gap by two percentage points; much more needs to be done but this is evidence that the work undertaken is beginning to have a positive impact.

As you will be aware, since January there has been a marked improvement in inspection outcomes as an indicator of the quality of education in Cambridgeshire's primary schools, in contrast to the decline you describe from September to December. In the spring term there were 14 full and short inspections: seven schools improved from requiring improvement to good; five remained at good; and two remained at requiring improvement. The performance of no Cambridgeshire primary school declined. We are deeply aware that further improvement is needed and increasing the proportion of Cambridgeshire's schools that are good or outstanding remains a key priority in our school improvement strategy.

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I would also like to assure you that County Councillors are very much engaged with these issues. Educational outcomes are presented to the Children and Young People's Service Committee on an annual basis; there is Member representation on the Accelerating Achievement Strategy Steering Group; there have been Member-led reviews into Narrowing the Gap at primary and secondary level; and an Educational Achievement Board has recently been established so that Members can better hold Officers to account for the educational outcomes of all children in Cambridgeshire.

We value the support of HMI, for example in presenting at conferences and training headteachers and chairs of governors in school self-evaluation, and we will continue to work with the whole system to play our role in bringing about the improvements that the children and young people of Cambridgeshire are entitled to.

Yours sincerely



Adrian Loades

Executive Director: Children, Families and Adults Services

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Cc Cllr J Whitehead, Chairwoman of Children & Young People Committee
Cllr S Count, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council
Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive
Keith Grimwade, Service Director: Learning