

PEER REVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

To: **Children and Young People Committee**

Meeting Date: **3rd June 2014**

From: **Service Director: Learning**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/a** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **The purpose of this paper is to explain the background to the recent Peer Review of School Improvement, highlight its key findings and outline next steps.**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to note the findings of the Review and comment on the appropriateness of the objectives for the Post Review Action Plan.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2013, Ofsted indicated its intention to carry out targeted inspections of Local Authority school improvement services where educational outcomes give cause for concern, for the first time since 2004/5.
- 1.2 Ofsted's Annual East of England Regional Report 21012/13 highlighted a number of concerns across the region. For example, despite the region's relative affluence, primary school pupils in the East of England have one of the lowest chances in the country of attending a good or outstanding school.
- 1.3 As part of a collective response to this situation, and the likelihood of Ofsted inspections, Eastern Region Directors of Learning agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a peer review process across the region, to introduce a component of external challenge and support into the system.
- 1.4 Peer reviews are well established within social care departments in the Eastern Region but this was the first time this process had been applied to school improvement. A consultant was engaged by Essex County Council to support the process and Cambridgeshire agreed to be the pilot authority.
- 1.5 The Peer Review of Cambridgeshire's School Improvement Services took place on 25th and 27th March 2014. The Review had two main aims:
 - To challenge and support Cambridgeshire, identifying strengths and areas for development
 - To pilot an approach to peer reviews that can be rolled out across the Eastern Region.
- 1.6 The Learning Directorate carried out a self-evaluation exercise against the Ofsted framework and selected an area of relative weakness as the focus for the Review, namely our identification of, support and challenge for and impact on schools judged by Ofsted as Requiring Improvement (RI).
- 1.7 The Peer Review team comprised the Director from Essex and two of his senior colleagues, the Assistant Director from Hertfordshire and two senior officers from Norfolk, led by the external consultant.
- 1.8 Information about context and educational outcomes in Cambridgeshire was provided in advance and the process was managed internally by CFA's Performance and Quality Assurance Service.
- 1.9 Questionnaires were sent to all RI schools, additional documentation was provided on the days of the Review and a number of focus groups were held with schools, governors, LA officers and Members.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 The Peer Review successfully identified strengths and areas for development and was an excellent learning experience. The three Reviewing authorities offered follow-up visits and/or materials to support improvement, from which we shall also benefit.

- 2.2 The report is set out in Appendix 1. Its main findings can be summarised as:
- **Strengths:** good relationships with schools; priorities and strategies for improvement have been clearly identified; the LA is providing a clear strategic lead on the priority to improve the attainment of FSM (Free School Meals) pupils; the LA is working successfully with schools to define its offer; and there are excellent examples of support provided by the LA.
 - **Areas for development:** Clarifying the LA's role and communicating our school improvement strategy; refining some processes, e.g. how we set targets for RI schools; and QA (Quality Assurance) procedures to secure a consistently high standard of challenge and support.
- 2.3 The Learning Directorate is preparing an action plan to address the issues identified in the Peer Review. This will be incorporated into the Directorate's Service Plan and progress will be monitored by the Children, Families and Adults Performance Board.
- 2.4 Five objectives have been identified for the Post Review Action Plan:
- To co-construct with schools, academies and key partners, including the Diocesan Authorities, a Cambridgeshire school improvement strategy
 - To develop further the LA's monitoring, challenge and intervention role
 - To refine, develop and implement a strategy for schools requiring improvement
 - To develop and implement a QA policy
 - To commission/provide a programme of support for school Governing Bodies to equip them better to hold schools to account for improvement.
- 2.5 A great deal was learnt to enable a successful roll out of the peer review process across the Eastern Region. This ranged from the very practical, e.g. how best to organise the focus groups, to how best to apply the Ofsted framework. The Peer Reviewers concluded that it was a 'fantastic opportunity to work with colleagues, as a learning opportunity'.
- 2.6 The Eastern Region Directors of Learning are meeting in June to plan the roll out of the process across region, beginning in autumn 2014.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

3.1.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Improved educational outcomes will provide a more highly skilled workforce
- A key factor in major companies' decisions to move to Cambridgeshire is access to good and outstanding schools for their workforce.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

3.2.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- There is a positive correlation between educational outcomes, standards of health and independent living.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

3.3.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- Poor educational progress of vulnerable groups is one of the main reasons why Ofsted judges that schools require improvement.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

4.1.1 There are no significant implications within this category. The actions identified can be met from within the Learning Directorate's current budget.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

4.2.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places upon LAs a duty to promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential in all schools.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

4.3.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- The vulnerable groups who make poor educational progress include those covered by the protected / significant characteristics of race and deprivation, e.g. Gypsy, Roma Traveller and Free School Meals.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

4.4.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- The School Improvement Strategy requires extensive engagement with schools, academies and key stakeholders. This is particularly relevant because of the Government's phased introduction of a school led school improvement system, with a changed role for LAs.

4.5 Public Health Implications

4.5.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- Improved educational outcomes will have a positive impact on standards of public health.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

4.6.1 There are no significant implications for this heading.

Source Documents	Location
Peer Review of Cambridgeshire LA's School Improvement Service, March 2014	Keith Grimwade, Service Director for Learning: <i>keith.grimwade@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</i>
Ofsted Annual Report 2012/13: East of England region	<u>http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-annual-report-201213-east-of-england-region</u>