Cabinet Member (Education)   12 November 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:
Cabinet Member (Education) – Councillor D Kershaw

Director Approving Submission of the report:
Executive Director, People

Ward(s) affected:
All

Title:
System Leadership Through School to School Support in Coventry – 12 Month Review of Progress and Impact

Is this a key decision?
No

Executive Summary:

In September 2013, the Local Authority (LA) launched its school improvement strategy. Informal evaluations were made by the officers after six months but this lacked an external perspective. As a result, the senior management team of the Education and Inclusion Service agreed to commission an external evaluation one year after the improvement strategy's launch to identify what was working well; understand what was working less successful; and, provide guidance to school leaders and officers of the LA about what they might do next to refine and improve the process.

The Institute of Education was approached and as a result of a proposal submission, Professor Toby Greany and Dr Tracey Allen were commissioned from the London Centre for Leadership in Learning to undertake the external evaluation.

The key findings of their report are presented at the request of the Cabinet Member (Education).

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member (Education) is requested to agree that:

1.   The key findings of the report be considered and discussed by school leaders and officers of the Local Authority in the autumn term 2014.

2.   Coventry's School Improvement Strategy be adapted and modified in late autumn 2014, early spring 2015.

3.   A revised Coventry School Improvement Strategy be completed in the summer of 2015 and implemented from the beginning of the 2015 academic year.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background Papers

None

Other useful documents:

The currently unpublished background papers should be used to support this report.

School Improvement Networks and System Leadership in Coventry: Evaluating progress, areas for development and possible next steps. Greany, T and Allen, T. London Centre for Leadership in Learning, Institute of Education, September 2014.

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:
System Leadership Through School to School Support in Coventry – 12 Month Review of Progress and Impact.

1. Context (or background)

1.1 In September 2013, the Local Authority (LA) launched its school improvement strategy. Informal evaluations were made by the officers after six months but this lacked an external perspective. As a result, the senior management team of the Education and Inclusion Service agreed to commission an external evaluation one year after the improvement strategy's launch to identify what was working well; understand what was working less successful; and, provide guidance to school leaders and officers of the LA about what they might do next to refine and improve the process.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 The Institute of Education was approached and as a result of a proposal submission, Professor Toby Greany and Dr Tracey Allen were commissioned from the London Centre for Leadership in Learning to undertake the external evaluation.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 There is a tradition of informal peer support between schools in the authority and a widespread allegiance to 'the Coventry family'.

3.2 All schools recognise that the LAs capacity is reducing and that it cannot fulfil many of its former roles. Views expressed by schools included that: the LA was good in the past but 'lost its way' a few years back; that it has been very inwardly focussed as it has grappled with cuts and personnel changes; that it has sometimes provided insufficient leadership and challenge; and that it has been overly focussed on primaries.

3.3 A common view was the networks were established poorly, with little clarity on the vision at the outset.

3.4 More encouragingly, most felt: that the LA has improved in the past 18 months; that the new model of differentiated challenge from Education Improvement Advisors (now renamed Coventry Improvement Partners - CIPs) with a focus on schools at risk is credible; and that the recent development of protocols for NLE brokerage is helpful.

3.5 The networks are widely welcomed by schools and are seen to be developing reasonably well. Some school networks are characterised by high levels of trust and are providing an extensive array of services focussed on school improvement and wider 'back-office' functions, generally enabled by shared appointments. These tend to be the networks that have been established for a longer period of time.

3.6 All the networks have moved some way beyond the Headteachers to include senior and middle as well as wider groups to differing degrees. The wider evidence base indicates that this is critical to the success of the networks.

3.7 In general, the primaries are further ahead with this collaborative work. Several Secondaries reported that the competitive context is a barrier to deep, local collaboration.

3.8 Some schools and networks are weaker in capacity and/or trust. These are often, but not exclusively, the newly formed networks or networks where membership has been turbulent.

3.9   Some networks are content to provide mutual support and share good practice: they do not aspire to provide hard-edged challenge or be a mechanism for addressing systemic challenges, such as Initial Teacher Education (ITE) or succession planning.

3.10   Most schools are pragmatic about gaining what they can gain from the network, but do not see it as the core locus for school improvement efforts. However, when asked where Head teachers expect to go to for support and challenge in 18 months' time in the survey, school networks and Teaching Schools were seen by many as key sources.

3.11   The alignment between networks and formal system leadership designations (e.g. Teaching Schools and National Leaders of Education (NLEs)/ Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs)) remains problematic. Some schools are frustrated that the support available from Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) does not meet their needs. Others question whether TSAs should be allowed to combine strategic and operational roles within the LA, with a sense that they lack sufficient capacity (and yet, paradoxically, are 'generously funded') and have failed to galvanise the potential of all schools. Overall the role of the networks and their relationship with TSAs and, to a lesser extent, NLEs needs to be made clearer, with brokerage of and capacity for school-to-school support a key issue. The work to date on a coherent continuing professional development (CPD) offer is seen to have potential, but some schools feel confused by competing provision.

3.12   There are several examples where school-to-school support has been successfully brokered and undertaken within the LA, leading to improvements in outcomes. A few network leaders identify specific impacts, for example on school performance, curriculum and professional development, or efficiencies, which they attribute to network activity. However, at this stage, it is hard to find significant evidence of impact from school partnerships in Coventry.

4.   Recommendations

4.1   Develop a shared and practical vision

4.2   Develop a strategic group, possibly chaired by the LA but with representation from networks and external partners to share vision, monitor progress and provide challenge;

4.3   Establish a school-to-school support group chaired by school leaders charged with brokering school to school support

5.   Objectives

Short term:

5.1   Build the evidence base and agree the vision

5.2   Investigate alternative models for partnership and school led improvement

5.3   Address common challenges through focussed school led research and development projects

5.4   Use data and evidence more effectively to inform development within and across networks

Medium term:

5.5   Build network capacity

5.6   Develop and evaluate a Coventry approach top peer review

5.7 Extend the reach of executive heads, federations and Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) over time

Long term:

5.8 Strategic capacity building

5.9 Develop Coventry-wide school-led Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

5.10 Develop aspirant system leaders

6. Timetable for implementing this decision

6.1 The outcomes and findings of this report be discussed by school leaders and officers of the LA in the autumn term 2014

6.2 Action will then be taken in late autumn early spring 2015 to adapt and modify Coventry's School Improvement Strategy.

6.3 A revised Coventry School Improvement Strategy will be completed in the summer of 2015 and implemented from the beginning of the 2015 academic year.

6.4 The impact of the decisions and recommendations set out in this report will be monitored through evaluating the impact on pupil outcomes, the increase in the number of good or outstanding schools, auditing the effectiveness of support provided by the TSA, the timeliness and quality of support provided for those schools identified as causing the LA concern, the success in recruiting high quality teachers and leaders into the City.

6.5 These findings will be shared routinely with the Cabinet Member (Education).

7. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

7.1 There are no financial implications.

7.2 There are no legal implications.

8. Other implications

There are no other specific implications.

8.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

This work will contribute to the achievement of the Councils key objective to ensure that children and young people achieve.

8.2 How is risk being managed?

No key risks are identified with this proposal.

8.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

There is no impact on staffing/human resources, information and communications technology, accommodation, assets, or the council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

8.4   Equalities / EIA

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because the outcomes of this work will apply to all groups e.g. disabled people/ different ethnic groups/ gender/ age (including children and young people)/ sexual orientation/ disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

6.5   Implications for (or impact on) the environment

There is no impact on the environment.

6.6   Implications for partner organisations?

There are no implications for partner organisations.

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