



West  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 25 January 2022

### Agenda Item 7

#### An overview of activity by West Northamptonshire Council to support school improvement

## 1 Background

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the legal powers and duties of the council relating to school effectiveness. There is a crucial difference between school improvement and school effectiveness. School improvement is a matter for individual schools, schools that have agreed to work together, or academy trust groups (which often make their own school improvement arrangements).
- 1.2 School effectiveness describes the local authority's (LA) legal duty under the Education Act, 1996 (as amended by the various subsequent acts). Section 13a of the 1996 act (see [here](#)) sets out the duty (of LAs responsible for education) to promote high standards and fulfilment of pupils' potential.
- 1.3 This report focuses on:
  - school effectiveness, including school improvement for schools 'of concern' as defined by the Department for Education (DfE);
  - the school effectiveness duties relating to academy schools, and the way West Northamptonshire engages with academy schools where there are concerns about performance;
  - the number and type of schools, and latest Ofsted inspection outcomes; and
  - the number of schools causing concern, with action taken and future risks.

## 2 The school effectiveness service: duties and powers

- 2.1 The school effectiveness service (SES) fulfils the council's statutory duty to ensure that maintained schools are at least 'good' and to intervene – using powers vested in it through the Education and Inspections Act, 2006 – where a maintained school is 'of concern'.
- 2.2 We recognise that academy trusts, headteacher and governors are responsible for the performance of the schools they lead and for making the best use of the resources available to them. However, the SES monitors the performance of academy schools in West Northamptonshire, using publicly available data, and the school effectiveness strategy sets out the engagement process with academy trusts where we have concerns about the performance of an academy. This fulfils the duty we have as a council under the 1996 Act as set out in paragraph 1.2 above.
- 2.3 The SES facilitates change and works directly with settings, or deploys partners, for example, partnership head teachers (PHTs) and associate head teachers, to support, challenge and drive improvement. As part of the commitment to school effectiveness, the school effectiveness team will review key priorities based on data analysis, school intelligence and/or changes to current educational thinking and where appropriate will provide county wide continuing professional development (CPD) to address the needs. This may be in addition to or as part of the training offer provided by the teaching school hub.
- 2.4 As noted above, school improvement becomes a matter for the LA where a maintained school is formally 'of concern' as defined in the government's statutory guidance (see [here](#)) and the school effectiveness team will take appropriate action. This may be through informal processes such as the implementation of a targeted improvement group (TIG) or through formal schools causing concerns processes. The threshold for triggering 'targeted support' may include but is not limited to:

- data declining significantly, or being below national average in one or more key indicators;
- the school is at risk of an inadequate judgement or is given an inadequate judgement by Ofsted;
- safeguarding is not effective as judged by the local authority or by Ofsted;
- leadership and management is a cause for concern (including governance);
- the school is at risk of a requiring improvement judgement or is given a requires improvement judgement for a first or second time by Ofsted; or
- significant concerns with finance, attendance, behaviour or exclusions.

2.5 The appendix to this report details the powers of intervention in maintained schools through the Education and Inspections Act, 2006. The powers are extensive, ranging from requiring a governing body to enter contracts for specified services to removing governing bodies and replacing them with an interim executive board.

2.6 The school effectiveness team has undergone extensive transformation in the last 18 months. Following a period of reduced capacity and subsequent recruitment, it comprises a head of service; three school improvement partners; one school improvement partner – governance; one school improvement partner – early years and one associate headteacher.

### 3 The schools estate

3.1 Table 1 shows that there are 186 schools in West Northamptonshire, of which 148 (almost 80 per cent) are primaries. A majority of primary schools – 83 out of 148 (56 per cent) – are academies, and all secondary schools are either single academies or part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). There are five ‘all-through’ (primary and secondary) schools, all of which are academies.

3.2 Geographically, the greatest number of schools, and pupils, are in Northampton. However, most schools are still outside the Northampton area, which has 43 per cent, with 33 per cent of schools in South Northamptonshire and 24 per cent in Daventry.

3.3 The percentage of primary schools in Northampton is lower, with 37 per cent against 36 and 27 per cent in the other two areas. However almost half the secondary schools, including all through schools, (50 per cent) are in Northampton, with 32 and 18 per cent in South Northants and Daventry.

**Table 1: schools by stage and status as of 01/09/21**

Type of Provision	No. schools by type	Northampton	S Northants	Daventry
<b>SEND, AP, hospital</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>LA Maintained Nursery</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>All-through Schools</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
LA Maintained	0	0	0	0
Academy	5	3	1	1
<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>148</b>			
LA Maintained	65	17	29	19
Academy	83	38	24	21
<b>Secondary Schools</b>	<b>17</b>			
Academy	17	8	6	3
LA Maintained	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Number of schools</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>45</b>

#### 4 Ofsted outcomes

4.1 Table 2 below shows the percentage of maintained schools in each grading band at their last inspection. The table also shows the percentage that are ‘good or better’ or ‘worse than good’. This is the key measure, as schools in England are expected to be at least good, and (as noted above in paragraph 1.2) LAs retain a duty to ‘promote high standards’.

**Table 2: percentage of Schools by Ofsted inspection outcome (LA maintained)**

School type	outstanding	good	RI	SM/SW	number
Nursery	40	60	0	0	5
	100		0		
Primary	11	83	6	0	64*
	94		6		
Special	67	33	0	0	3
	100		0		
Total	15	79	6	0	72
	94		6		

\* 1 school has yet to be inspected

4.2 The table shows that all maintained nursery schools, and all maintained special schools are at least good; and moreover that almost 19 out of 20 maintained primary schools are at least good. This means that West Northamptonshire maintained nursery and special schools are top of the table (along with a range of others), while maintained primary schools would rank 29<sup>th</sup> out of 151 LAs – top quartile performance. This would rank third out of 10 East Midlands LAs.

4.3 Table 3 shows the performance of academy schools in the last inspections. The table shows that four primary academies are in special measures and one special school, with a further eight ‘requiring improvement’ to be good. That is, a total of 12 primary schools that are not yet good.

4.4 While there is no secondary school graded ‘special measures’ required, or ‘serious weakness’, 27 per cent – six academies – are not yet good. The two alternative provisions (APs) – Spires free school and CE academy – were both graded inadequate last year, mainly due to safeguarding concerns. For more detail about the Ofsted outcomes of the APs see section 7 of the report on SEN and alternative provision.

4.5 LA school effectiveness officers have offered to work with the trusts concerned to assist with the improvement required. However, it must be made clear that the greater number and percentage of academy schools that are not yet good should not be seen to indicate the academy sector is weaker than maintained schools. A significant number of academy schools became a part of an academy trust as ‘sponsored academies’ because of a poor outcome – generally a serious weaknesses / special measures outcome) – in an Ofsted inspection.

**Table 3: percentage of schools by Ofsted inspection outcome (academy)**

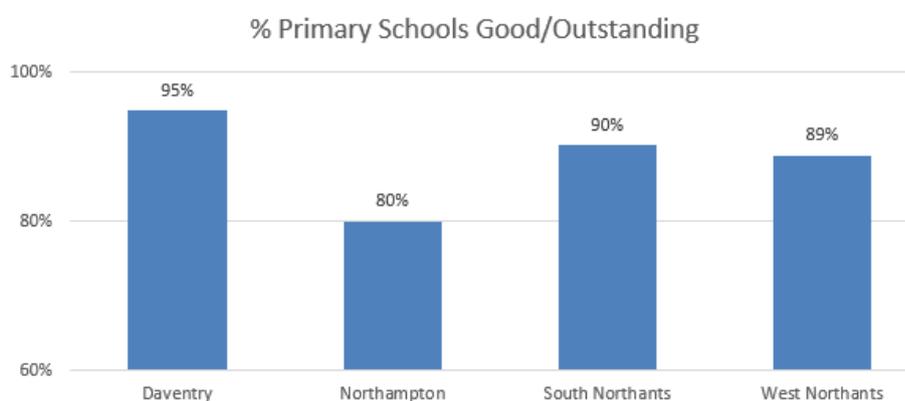
School type	outstanding	good	RI	SM/SW	number
Primary	11	73	10	5	79*
	84		15		
Secondary	18	55	27	0	22
	73		27		
Special	50	25	0	25	4**
	75		25		
AP/Hospital	33	0	0	66	3
	33		66		
Total	14	68	13	5	108
	82		18		

\*\* 4 schools have not been inspected so are not included in the data.

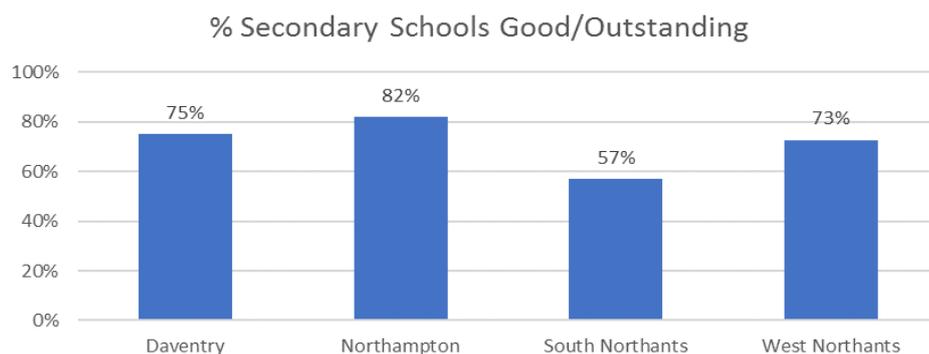
\*\* 1 SEN school has not been inspected so is not included in the data.

4.6 Tables 4 and 5 show the percentages of primary and secondary schools respectively that were graded ‘good or better’ at their last inspection by area as at 31/10/21. Table 4 shows that primary schools in Daventry (maintained and academy) have the best outcomes, with those in Northampton being weakest. However, secondary schools in Northampton had the best outcomes, with schools in the south the poorest. The outcomes in Northampton would put schools there 65<sup>th</sup> out of 151 ‘top-tier’ LAs – secondary quartile performance.

**Table 4: Ofsted outcome by area – primary schools**



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## **5 Schools causing concern**

- 5.1 The LA will undertake risk assessments in order to categorise all West Northamptonshire schools on an annual basis. Progress will be reviewed termly. School improvement partners have a key role in categorising schools but work with other LA services to ensure a holistic picture of the school is obtained.
- 5.2 Where an LA school has been identified as a school of concern (see paragraph 2.4), the school effectiveness team will take appropriate action either through informal processes (TIG) or through formal schools causing concerns (SCC) processes.
- 5.3 As of September 2021, action has been taken in five primary schools and one maintained nursery school. Of these, three are subject to the informal TIG process and three are subject to formal schools causing concerns processes. Support offered has included the deployment of an LA associate headteacher, 2-3 weekly school improvement partner visits, the setting of clear actions and regular monitoring and evaluation to assess impact of the actions taken and the brokering of additional support from outside agencies. In addition, the service has commissioned independent reviews. In all cases, progress is reviewed six-weekly.
- 5.4 As a result of measures taken, the positive impact of actions can be clearly seen in all but one school. Leadership has been strengthened through support offered and clear actions for improvement identified and implemented. Where improvement has not been seen in one school, the school is in the process of joining an academy trust. Examples of impact seen include:
- one school with an RI grading was deemed to be taking effective action in order for the school to be good by Ofsted in a recent monitoring visit;
  - one school (good but declining) has shown significant improvement and will be moved from the formal SCC process to informal process (TIG) at the next review;
  - in one school (good but at significant risk of inadequate judgement), the head has been managed out, the chair of governors has resigned and an associate head teacher and a new chair of governors has put in place until September 2022;
- 5.5 The SE service is also working in partnership with a MAT following an inadequate judgement.

## **6 Planned activity for 2022/23**

- 6.1 There is planned activity in three areas: standards, partnership development and risk mitigation. For standards, the priorities and associated activity for the forthcoming year are:
- as the 2022 KS1, 2 and 4 assessment will provide the first set of validated school data since 2019, the SE team will analyse and identify key priorities and develop action plan accordingly;
  - changes to new education inspection framework may leave some schools vulnerable: therefore SIP visits have identified that curriculum development is an area of concern, and training for schools and deep dives will be conducted in all LA maintained primary schools to assess the risk;
  - continue to use intelligence from visits, data scrutiny and the single conversation to identify training needs for schools and link with teaching school hub as and where required;
  - to develop a good to outstanding CPD programme to ensure schools are aspirational; and
  - work with other LA services to reduce the rate of exclusions and off-rolling particularly at Secondary school level.
- 6.2 In terms of partnership development the service will continue to engage with MAT CEOs and strengthen leadership forums to ensure that these are sector led.
- 6.3 For risk mitigation, we will work with school place planning team to identify pressures on schools due to falling roll linked to drop-in birth rate and develop a strategy to mitigate risk to LA and to support schools.