
A STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Cyndi Hughes,
Children and Young People Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Murray Rose, Director of People

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks Cabinet approval for a revised set of arrangements in order for the Local Authority to fulfil its statutory obligation to monitor the performance of schools and to challenge underperformance.

Summary

2. The proposed set of arrangements would replace the current protocols previously agreed by Cabinet in 2008. They will take into account the significant changes in education arrangements which have taken place since 2008, including the increased diversity of provision, the changing relationship between schools and local authorities and the reduction in centrally retained education staff.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the proposed arrangements for monitoring school standards attached as **Appendix 1**.

Reasons

4. In order to fulfil the statutory duty of the Local Authority to have an approved strategy for monitoring and challenging school performance.

Murray Rose
Director of People

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Murray Rose : Extension 2098

S17 Crime and Disorder	No specific implications
Health and Well Being	No specific implications
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	No specific implications
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	Children and Young People
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report contributes to the priority of 'the best start in life for every child' as set out in the Community Strategy.
Efficiency	An effective strategy to monitor school performance will reduce the likelihood of having to increase future spending on intervening in schools

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. Every local authority has a duty to monitor the performance of its schools (maintained schools and Academies) and to challenge underperformance (again, for maintained schools and Academies). Local authorities are funded at a basic level to deliver this function through the revenue support grant.
6. The current arrangements that were agreed by Cabinet in 2008 itemise the levels of support, challenge and intervention that the local authority would carry out and the method by which the authority would arrive at its judgements of school performance.
7. Since 2008, the duty on the local authority has not been changed but the context has been. In Darlington, 75% of schools have become Academies and that percentage may increase and there is currently one Free School and a second application in train. The authority took the opportunity in 2010 and 2011 to delegate more resources for school improvement to schools themselves and to reduce the level of monitoring, support and intervention that would be provided by the Council officers. Furthermore, the level and sophistication of data available to monitor school performance, and the expected norms set by Ofsted and the Department of Education, changed significantly.
8. The current position, therefore, is that we have a set of arrangements that are not fit for purpose. To their credit, Darlington schools have continued to work in partnership with the authority within the existing arrangements, even though they are aware of their limitations.

9. Schools, through the schools@onedarlington model, have worked with officers on developing a more robust and relevant set of arrangements, with the expectation that they will be in place for September 2014.
10. The significant differences between the proposed arrangements and the current arrangements are as follows:-
 - (a) Increased use of timely data and of the analysis of sub-sets of data;
 - (b) A guarantee that the data will be reviewed by someone with the training and experience of an Ofsted inspector;
 - (c) Greater opportunity to consider the school's own self-assessment;
 - (d) A clear, stepped approach to what schools should do to respond to any areas of underperformance;
 - (e) A clear approach to how schools can help and support each other;
 - (f) A recognition that schools are responsible for funding their own improvement.
11. What does not change in the proposed arrangements are as follows:-
 - (a) The use of published data to inform judgements;
 - (b) A dialogue with schools about their performance;
 - (c) The expectation that schools are responsible for their own performance.
 - (d) The ultimate power of the local authority to issue warning notices and/or to escalate concerns to agencies such as Ofsted and the Department of Education.

Consultation

12. Schools have been closely involved in the development of the new arrangements, through a working party approach and through three Headteacher conferences. Governors have also had opportunities to be involved, both by attendance at the governor briefing sessions and by dialogue with their Headteachers. In addition, the proposals have been shared with regional Ofsted teams and with regional school improvement specialists.