

Report to Cllr Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills

January 2023

Education and Learning Strategy 2023-25

Report by Assistant Director of Education & Skills

Electoral division(s): All

Summary

Following the covid pandemic and the end of the School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-22, it is appropriate that the County Council reassesses its priorities for education and learning and to reflect a renewed plan to tackle some of the challenges that have arisen as a consequence of the last three years' disruption. The opportunity to reassess priorities and to identify a course of actions in education and learning also builds upon a redesign of the services supporting education, along with major national education policy developments.

A consultation and engagement process took place across the spring and summer 2022 to identify and test out key themes and priorities with a range of stakeholders, and also to incorporate some major policy initiatives announced by the Government in April 2022 some of which are not proceeding. Feedback from the engagement process was reviewed and was subject to scrutiny by the CYPSSC along with a Task and Finish Group which reviewed the draft Strategy and made recommendations during the autumn 2022. The recommendations have been considered and incorporated into the final version of the Education and Learning Strategy. Workstream plans have begun to be developed in line with the launch of key priorities. However, some of the workstreams are not due to go live immediately and the detail of these workstreams will be developed at the appropriate time.

The Strategy identifies seven Key Themes as priorities, two of which are outcome focused and five of which are linked to provision. The Key Theme of SEND & Inclusion remains at the heart of the Strategy, ensuring that the key principles and actions identified in the County Council's SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2019-24 which is still current, are embedded within this broader Education and Learning Strategy.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills is asked to approve the adoption of the Education and Learning Strategy (Appendix 1) and the summary workstreams underpinning the Strategy's intent (Appendix 2) as set out in section 3 of this report

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 In 2018 the County Council produced a School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-22 focused on bringing about improved outcomes for children in the County. The Strategy focused on improving provision in schools. In 2019, the Council agreed a SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2019-24 and which is still current. This Strategy aims to improve inclusive practice, address a previous shortfall in provision and to improve both the quality and access of support for children with SEND in West Sussex. Beyond these two strategies, the County Council has not had a cohesive strategy to address all provision and all phases of education and learning.
- 1.2 A redesign of the Department for Children, Young People and Learning between 2020-22 has restructured service areas and enabled the Education and Skills Service to hold a single view of the learning journey for children from the age of two, through primary and secondary education, and also now into post 16 provision. Whilst the County Council is not responsible for the direct delivery of education and learning for children, a responsibility which rests with early years settings, schools and colleges, it does have statutory responsibilities including the assessment and provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These statutory responsibilities cover championing high achievement and outcomes, intervening in provision where there are concerns, and ensuring effective safeguarding procedures in educational organisations. However, for most work in improving provision and outcomes, the local authority needs to work through influence, leadership, and through engagement with schools and early years providers who deliver provision.
- 1.3 As the country emerges from three years of covid disruption and schools begin to return to business as usual, it is the right time to look forward and to reset priorities for the next three years. This coincides with the publication of national education policy developments. The Strategy was developed to incorporate national policy developments announced during the summer 2022. All were considered in discussions around priorities for the Strategy. However, with a change in central government, one of these key policy developments, The Schools Bill, incorporating policy outlined in the Education White Paper 'Opportunities for All' (April 2022), has been withdrawn. We still await detail on government policy in SEND and Alternative Provision following the SEND Green Paper consultation held during the summer 2022.
- 1.4 The return to national assessment and examinations in 2022 saw a fall in outcomes from pre-pandemic levels nationally and in West Sussex, along with increasing numbers of children and young people showing signs of anxiety and both mental and emotional ill health.
- 1.5 Behind the performance data and increasing challenges being faced by children as they return to school, there are ten key challenges facing the local authority and which were raised in the engagement events:
 - a. Whilst **academic success and educational outcomes** have improved in recent years, there is still more to do to ensure that every child achieves

as well as they ought. Some families face particular challenges which put them at a disadvantage. The impact of the Covid has interrupted learning and the confidence of many children and young people.

- b. Children who have **SEND or are vulnerable, for example young carers, are not achieving as well as they might** and **inclusive practice is not consistently applied** in all schools and across all parts of the county to enable them to do so.
- c. There are still **too many children leaving education and learning** either through exclusions or through parents removing children as provision is not meeting their child's needs.
- d. The **quality of provision** for children and young people varies across the county. This results in 'inequality of access' depending on where they live in the county and also on a young person's starting point and interests.
- e. Even before children reach school age, the **underachievement of our disadvantaged children** is notable compared with their non-disadvantaged peers. Although some achieve well in some parts of the county and in some schools, the overall discrepancy seen in disadvantaged children's readiness for school remains a constant throughout their learning journey.
- f. **Removing the barriers** to academic success for some children and young people is complex and requires the engagement of many partners.
- g. **Pathways and provision for students after the age of 16 years** vary across the county. There can be limited opportunities for the full range of options in some areas. This leads to students having to travel to the courses they want to study and which are appropriate to their needs.
- h. Some of our most **vulnerable young people** continue to be at risk of criminal exploitation, exclusion or harm.
- i. The current number of **specialist SEND school places** across maintained schools and academies is currently insufficient to meet escalating need. In the future this could lead to children increasingly having to travel out of their local communities or attend private schools.
- j. The **proportion of surplus places** in our primary schools is increasing as the birth rate falls and house building slows down. This both places pressure on schools on retaining staff and managing the needs of all children with dwindling resources. It also leads to some schools becoming vulnerable, affecting their ability to continue their improvement journey and maintain financial stability.

2 The National Policy Context

- 2.1 During the engagement process several key policy statements and papers were published which provide future direction in some aspects of education and learning. The [Post 16 White Paper](#) produced in the early spring 2022 outlined key changes to post 16 qualifications and both curriculum and support for those young people over the age of 16 years. This has now become law and, whilst focusing on young people over the age of 16 years,

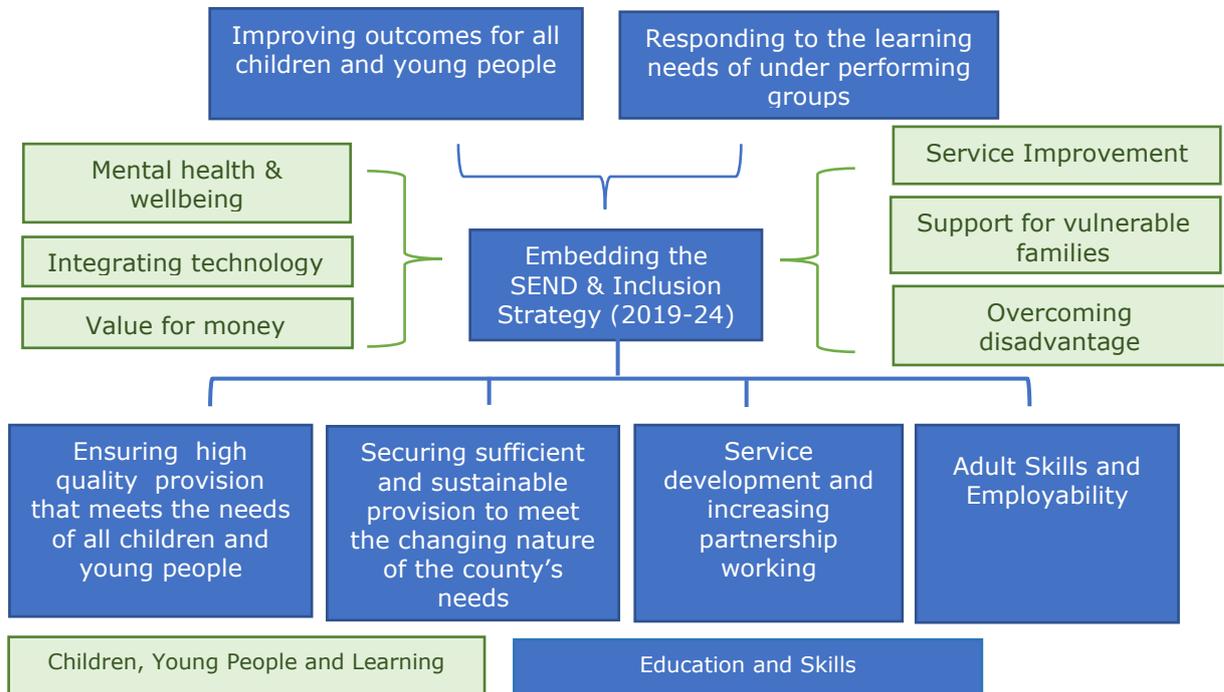
there are implications for how younger children are guided and supported towards the appropriate post 16 courses and qualifications. The changes will have significant implications on what, and how schools and partner providers provide education and learning for young people over the age of 16. They will have implications on schools and the local authority in its future planning.

- 2.2 The [Education White Paper: Opportunities for All \(April 2022\)](#) outlined key changes in responsibilities for local authorities with greater definition in relation to its strategic role for planning school places and admissions, The White Paper provided a responsibility for local authorities to plan for all schools to be within a partnership with a strong Multi Academy Trust (MAT) or with a plan to be so by 2030. However, the Schools Bill, tabled to enact the White Paper into law has been withdrawn. This has led to the draft Education and Learning Strategy being reviewed in light of changes in national policy and ambitions.
- 2.3 Whilst the [SEND Green Paper](#) consultation was concluded in July 2022, detail on the government's response to the consultation is still awaited. More recent policy statements relating to maths similarly are awaiting greater detail and clarity. It is therefore proposed that that the Council's Education and Learning Strategy 2022-25 remains a dynamic strategy that is able to adapt and change as further detail on national policy drivers are launched and detail known.

3 Proposal details

- 3.1 It is proposed to adopt the Education and Learning Strategy as set out in Appendix 1. The strategic priorities arising from the engagement process and forming the Education and Learning Strategy cover seven key areas, two of which are child and student outcome focused, and five of which cover areas of provision and strategic support.
- 3.2 Each of the key themes will be supported by specific workstreams as outlined in Appendix 2. Some are dependent on the outcomes of other workstreams. Therefore, it is planned that these are developed at the appropriate time in readiness for the Workstream's 'go live'. Where Workstreams contribute to the achievement of corporate performance measures, these will be clearly identified. Such measures are being reviewed as part of the Council Plan. Existing measures are currently included in the Strategy but, as it is aimed that the Strategy remains a dynamic document, this will allow for any changes in current measures to be included as they are agreed. Where there is the need for additional impact measures against any individual workstream, these will be identified and used by the Strategy Governance Board in their measurement of impact and progress.
- 3.3 The seven key themes also have close links to the broader plans and initiatives that are already in place and being embedded in the Children, Young People and Learning (CYPL) Department Plan. Collaborative working and co-ordination between different teams aims to ensure synergy and that the drivers and enablers within the CYPL plans are drawn upon in fulfilling the Council's ambitions for our children and young people.
- 3.4 An overview of the Key Themes arising from the process is captured below alongside some of the broader strategies and plans embedded within the Children, Young People and Learning Department's plans which work

alongside to provide a broader programme of support for children and learners.



3.5 A variety of stakeholders have a direct relationship with the County Council and a vested interest in improving provision for children and young people. There is shared accountability between stakeholders and partners for achieving the outcomes against the Key Themes within the Strategy. Such stakeholders include maintained schools and academies, multi academy trusts (MATs), early years providers and our post 16 colleges. Broader council service providers and representatives of our children and young people equally have a part to play in both shaping and monitoring the detail of the Strategy and its Workstreams, and in challenging impact. It is therefore proposed to establish a Strategy Partnership Board of stakeholder representatives which will provide oversight of the Education and Learning Strategy and to report progress and impact into the Children’s Services Improvement and Children First Boards.

3.6 As outlined in section 2 of the report, it is proposed that the Strategy is flexible to enable it to be amended in response to any further detail or announcements on changes to national policy.

4 Finance

Revenue Consequences

4.1 The financial costs of implementing this Strategy are routinely managed through the relevant budgets of the Learning and Skills Portfolio, and there are no additional costs associated with the adoption of the strategy.

4.2 A key financial driver of the Strategy is to contribute to a reduction in the DSG High Needs Block overspend resulting in increasing demand and cost of

SEND placements. Key Workstreams included in Theme 3: SEND & Inclusion, are directly linked to the High Needs Recovery Plan and cost avoidance.

Capital Expenditure

- 4.3 There are no additional capital costs directly associated with the adoption of this overarching strategy.
- 4.4 Included under the umbrella of this strategy is the SEND Sufficiency Strategy. Within this strategy £20.729m has already been identified in the capital programme for delivery of the highest priority projects to create in excess of an additional 317 specialist places for children with SEND.
- 4.5 The model encourages effective use of the budget to support broader Council teams in their objectives, freeing up budgets elsewhere, thus bringing a collective opportunity for efficiency and avoidable cost. This is particularly in the areas of Family Learning, ESOL and Adults with Learning Difficulties.

Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact

- 4.6 The Education and Skills directorate has undergone a re-structure over the last 12 months in order to support the workstreams set out in this strategy and therefore there is no requirement to increase internal capacity any further in order to deliver the strategy.
- 4.7 One exception to this is Key Theme 7 which includes the programme and future delivery mechanism for Adult Community Learning which is grant funded. A separate Key Decision Report is to be published for this (also subject to scrutiny by this Committee) and will include expansion of the Adult Community Learning team to incorporate the expertise required to run an effective curriculum. These roles will benefit from the existing Council infrastructure and overheads, rather than duplicating overheads through a subcontractor. They will be funded directly from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) grant provided for the delivery of adult learning.

5 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
School capacity and resources to bring about change are limited due to financial pressures and recruitment challenges	Workstreams build upon action plans that are appropriately paced in their development. Tools and guidance provided by the Education and Skills teams will continue to underpin and support schools and early years settings. However, where actions are on hold due to financial and resource pressures on the front line, Workstreams may need to be refined and adapted to reflect the resource available.
School disruption due to a resurgence of covid or other factors including industrial action impact	The dynamic nature of the Strategy will allow for Workstreams to be paused and for a refocusing of activity should there be any significant need to respond to a changing situation

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
on the continuity of provision	
National policy and education priorities lack clarity or consistency	The Strategy will be dynamic and held in a soft and interactive version able to be refined and adapted to reflect any major policy changes which have an impact on the existing Key Themes and Workstreams
Financial resources and capital funding are insufficient to support key initiatives and capital programmes involved in delivering the Strategy	The Workstreams and any particular initiatives developed to underpin the Strategy's Key Themes will be planned within the resources and committed funding available. This will be done in advance of agreeing the detailed content of such Workstreams, thereby moderating and prioritising actions and resources that are available and agreed

6 Policy alignment and compliance

6.1 Our Council Plan –

6.1.1 The Education and Learning Strategy links to all four priorities of the West Sussex Plan. It is integral to the Children and Young People's Plan and is focused on providing children with the best start in life.

6.2 Legal implications –

6.2.1 The statutory and legal responsibilities of the Council with respect to education and learning are reflected in the work of the Education and Skills team and their existing roles and responsibilities. The Strategy's Key Themes work within the current statutory role of a local authority and with clear reference to national policy and direction where the DfE has so determined.

6.3 Equality duty and human rights assessment –

6.3.1 The Strategy focuses on ensuring equality for all. It explicitly tackles both disadvantage and inequality based on socio-economic factors, vulnerability and special educational needs. It focuses on improving access to high achievement for all whilst overcoming barriers to success for those identified as being at risk of underachieving, thereby aiming to provide equity and justice for all. Data collection and analysis in line with the Key Themes and Workstreams will monitor progress and improved outcomes of the diverse range of learner groups to ensure that high quality provision and support is being accessed proportionately by the local population. All learner groups, regardless of having a protected characteristic or not, will be monitored to ensure they are achieving in line with their peers, allowing interventions if needed.

6.4 **Climate change** –

6.4.1 The impact on the climate will be considered through any capital works undertaken to support the achievement of the Strategy goals, in particular the provision of school places, transport of children to and from their place of learning, and in plans to address the Strategy's aims for 'Live Local-Learn Local.'

6.5 **Crime and disorder** –

6.5.1 The Strategy focuses on improving outcomes for those at risk of exploitation and crime and upon the provision of the skills and pathways to qualifications and employment. Close working partnerships with Children's Social Care and Early Help teams, along with explicit planning for the strengthening of joint working between all partners in tackling a reduction in youth crime is central to improving outcomes for young people. The Key Themes within the Strategy explicitly target those at risk of exclusion and exploitation and therefore focus on improving positive outcomes for all children and reducing the risk of crime.

6.6 **Public health** –

6.6.1 The Strategy supports Public Health across all the curriculum areas and specifically through the development of healthy life skills and improved wellbeing for children.

6.7 **Social value** –

6.7.1 The whole Strategy aims to achieve improved social value for all children and young people through providing them with the skills, opportunities and pathways to successful achievement and learning. This aims to improve longer term positive engagement in society through ensuring young people have the skill, knowledge and confidence to contribute positively within society.

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Appendices:

Annex 1: Education and Learning Strategy

Annex 2: Education and Learning Strategy Themes and Workstreams

Background Papers:

None