

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE  
SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING



Wednesday, 20 January 2021

## **SCHOOLS ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN SURREY**

Purpose of the report:

To update the Select Committee on the work of Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) during its second year of delivering school-improvement services. In particular to:

- enable the Select Committee to review available data on the educational attainment of children in Surrey's schools
- consider the impact of work undertaken by SAfE to identify and support vulnerable schools
- provide an update on the impact of SAfE's work to close the gap between the outcomes of pupils with SEND and of disadvantaged pupils when compared to their peers

### **Introduction**

1. SAfE is a not-for-profit school improvement company incorporated in September 2019. It is an alliance of Surrey schools and other partners, including the local authority, delivering a high quality, cohesive, coordinated school-led improvement system to serve all children and schools in the Surrey and wider area from nursery to post-16. SAfE was built upon a strong legacy of partnership working between schools bringing coherence to the education system and to ensure that all schools have access to the support that they need.
2. Surrey County Council discharges its statutory duties in relation to school effectiveness and schools causing concern through the company, as agreed by Cabinet on 16 July 2019.

3. Select Committee was provided with an update on the work of SAfE on 28 July 2020. As requested by the Select Committee this report provides a further update focusing particularly on the work of SAfE during the continuing pandemic and the work of SAfE in improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils and in vulnerable schools. It also provides an update on the available data on the educational attainment of Surrey pupils.

#### **Update on SAfE's work since July 2020**

4. SAfE's strategy is based on four inter-linking priorities that are also aligned with the council's expectations:
  - School Improvement
  - Professional learning
  - Vulnerable Groups
  - Engagement and Partnerships

For 2020/21 these were amended to take into consideration the COVID pandemic – details can be found in Annex 1.

5. Since September SAfE has continued to deliver the contract with Surrey to deliver its statutory School Improvement function in addition to playing a key role in supporting schools and leaders throughout the COVID-19 crisis. SAfE has:
  - 5.1. continued to develop and amend the School Improvement strategy in light of both the challenges placed on schools due to the COVID crisis, the lack of statutory data and Ofsted inspections and the development of a school-led system.
  - 5.2. developed and introduced a cohesive evidence-based strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Further details can be found later in this paper (see paragraph 31).
  - 5.3. developed and grown a strategy to support inclusion through delivering professional development and training to build the skills of teachers and leaders working in mainstream schools.
  - 5.4. run a comprehensive programme of over 60 professional learning opportunities focused on six key areas. Attendance and feedback has been very strong with less than 6% of schools and academies not attending any event. Further detail can be found in Annex1.
  - 5.5. collaborated with all schools and academies to ensure continuation of our 'for schools, by schools' approach.
  - 5.6. worked in close partnership with the Directorate of Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture and Phase Councils and led on two of the four strands

of the Surrey Schools and Settings COVID-19 Recovery Plan: Organisation and People and Learning and Narrowing the Gap.

6. In addition, in collaboration with Phase Councils we are running our first Leadership Summit – Leadership for Now, Leadership for the Future on 10th February 2021.
7. Formal termly contract management meetings are in place as are informal monthly meetings between the Director of School Improvement and the Service Lead for Education. Revised key performance indicators are in place given the lack of performance data, routine Ofsted inspections and COVID-19.

#### **KS4 and KS5 outcomes 2020**

8. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the summer exam series was cancelled in 2020. Pupils scheduled to sit GCSE and A/AS level exams in 2020 were awarded either a centre assessment grade (based on what the school or college believed the student would most likely have achieved had exams gone ahead) or their calculated grade using a model developed by Ofqual - whichever was the higher of the two.
9. At KS 4 regional and sub-regional level attainment data has been produced based on awarded grades. Performance tables for individual schools will not be published in 2020. Progress measures are not being published in 2020.
10. Nationally each of the pupil level attainment statistics have increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. **As a result the 2019/20 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance.**

#### **Key Stage 4**

11. When compared to England and the South-East, Surrey continues to perform better at both headline measures of Attainment 8 and the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 4+ or 5+ in both English and Mathematics.
12. Surrey pupils achieved an Attainment 8 score of 53.6, higher than the DFE National figure of (50.2) and Statistical Neighbours (51.1).
13. Surrey has a higher than National and Statistical Neighbours proportion of students entered for all elements of the EBacc this year, 44.9% compared with 39.8% and 40.9%. The EBacc average point score per pupil in Surrey was 4.76, higher than National (4.38) and Statistical Neighbours (4.52).

14. The gap between disadvantaged pupils in Surrey and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally is greater than their disadvantaged pupils nationally and continues to be a concern – see paragraph 31 for further details and Annex 5. However, overall attainment for pupils with SEN (SEN support or Education Health Care Plans) is either in line with national or above.

### **Key Stage 5**

15. The Average Point Score (APS) for Surrey pupils entered for a least one A Level entry and Applied General is higher than National but showing lower than National for APS Tech Level.

16. Further details on Key Stage 4 and 5 outcomes can be found in Annex 2.

17. The exam series for 2021 will take place albeit with some amendments. Significant work is being put in place to ameliorate learning gaps and support those pupils where there are significant gaps. Additional funding from the Local Authority is supporting this. See Annex 3.

### **School Improvement and support for vulnerable schools**

18. In light of the absence of statutory data as a result of COVID, for the 2020/21 academic year the School Improvement Strategy has been amended to adopt a more risk-based approach. This incorporates the challenges that have become more prominent in the current circumstances schools are working under. See annex 4 – Risk Assessment Process - for further details.

19. Currently there are 38 Support and Challenge Schools (S&C schools). All S&C schools have been allocated a SAfE adviser and an attached S&C partner (NLE or other system leader). All S&C schools have a robust action plan. A process is in place to broker required intervention and support, where necessary (although funding is not available for this through the School Improvement contract).

20. Of the 34 primary schools, 6 have been identified as concerning in terms of their lack of progress against targets. Each of these schools will receive full teaching and learning, governance and EYFS reviews in the Spring Term to establish a baseline of progress which incorporates the impact of the COVID situation. If it is felt at this point that the leadership and governance in the school is not sufficient to achieve the required improvement, SAfE will liaise with the LA to determine the implementation of statutory intervention powers.

21. All special schools and Alternative Provisions will have a one day risk assessment visit by a specialist National Leader of Education (NLE) consultant this academic year. All attached special units are being reviewed by a specialist consultant.

***Key overarching issues in schools identified from the recent risk assessment process:***

22. **Safeguarding:** a number of schools have had significant safeguarding issues in the last 12 months – either a single safeguarding issue or where the general standard of safeguarding compliance highlights inadequacies in leadership and governance. In both cases this will impact negatively on a school's Ofsted judgement. In some schools these issues have not been picked up swiftly enough. Where issues are identified SAfE escalates the concerns for safeguarding to the LA, as the LA retains the duty to ensure satisfactory safeguarding in all schools.
23. **Mitigation:** Revised safeguarding audit arrangements are enabling the local authority to identify weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements in a more robust and timely way. The Education Safeguarding Team in the local authority (LA) will be undertaking dip sampling of the safeguarding audit returns and the team also work closely with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the Service Lead for Education to ensure that training for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and Governors reflects current and emerging issues.
22. **Small schools:** it is increasingly clear that a growing number of small schools are reaching the Support and Challenge threshold, or are vulnerable to it ,on account of their lack of financial viability and staffing sustainability. The financial demands arising from the period of COVID with regards to staff cover costs, have in many cases compounded already stretched budgets.
23. **Mitigation:** The LA is working with individual schools on recovery plans but more importantly will be leading on a strategic piece of work with small schools to consider different ways to secure sustainability. Some schools also need to plan for future changes in the light of reducing pupil numbers in the locality. This will be picked up in the sustainability work.
24. **Budgetary constraints:** concerns over viability and funding due to place planning pressures; teachers' pay increases and the impact of COVID on income and expenditure are being highlighted.
25. **Mitigation:** for schools within the local authority this situation is being monitored carefully through budget monitoring and action taken identify concerns early and work with schools to develop budget management plans. The issues affecting schools continue to be highlighted to the Department for Education in respect of COVID 19 impacts.
26. **Governance:** a number of challenges have been identified particularly during the COVID period including lack of effective monitoring, confusion over roles and responsibilities, effective communication, and safeguarding. As previously

discussed at Select Committee, schools 'experience is that providing effective support and challenge is made more difficult by the division of roles between the LA, SAfE, Cognus, SGA and Strictly Education.

27. **Mitigation:** SAfE has increased the amount of governance support available for schools that are designated as Support and Challenge. The LA has drafted a scoping document for a review of Governance and will be taking this piece of work forward in the Spring term.
28. **SEND and Inclusion:** in a number of schools there is additional pressure and challenge due to the placement and resourcing of individual children and young people with SEND either with EHCP plans or awaiting assessment.
29. **Mitigation:** The improvement to the timeliness of EHCP plans being completed will enable the right provision and support to be identified and delivered more quickly. Surrey has less EHCP children in mainstream schools when benchmarked against other local authorities and so a key piece of SEND transformation work is to ensure that outstanding practice in schools is identified and shared and that we develop the skills of staff in mainstream schools including successful use of outreach services. The provision of additional SEND places in Surrey through the SEND Capital programme will also enable pupils that need specialist provision to remain in our Surrey schools
30. **Inexperienced leadership:** a number of schools have inexperienced leaders who have been particularly challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have struggled to work in a strategic manner and retain a focus on whole school development. This has included challenges with monitoring progress without data or classroom observations, or rigorously and robustly being able to self-evaluate the quality of education.
31. **Mitigation:** Heads in S&C schools are allocated and supported by an experienced NLE (6 days per year). In addition, SAfE has a wide range of professional learning programmes and support for headteachers in place including a programme for New Head Teachers, Early Career Heads and professional partnering and leadership coaching. The development of a peer-review and support process is underway for the next academic year.

### **Improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND**

32. A key priority for SAfE is to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Considering further analysis of outcomes for disadvantage pupils, through working with the Education Endowment foundation, The Education Policy Institute and a number of other national experts, we have drawn our work together into a cohesive evidence informed strategy.

33. Our strategy is based around 3 connected strands:

- Quality first Teaching
- Literacy and Early language Acquisition
- Innovative Curriculum Design

34. Programme content and design is underpinned by robust evidence and expertise making explicit links between theory, evidence and classroom practice. We are working with leading national experts such as Mark Rowland, Christine Counsell and Jean Gross to design and deliver our programmes. Further details can be found in Annex 5.

35. A number of strands of this strategy are currently underway with very positive uptake from schools.

36. Our approach also supports the key challenge of improving outcomes for Children in Need.

37. Supporting schools to be inclusive and be able to support children with SEND in mainstream schools through the development of teachers and leaders' skills and understanding is a key priority for SAfE. We currently are running three programmes working with David Bartram OBE, Whole Education and WholeSchool SEND. In addition, we are facilitating the SENDCO networks for mainstream schools. Further details are also in Annex 5.

<b>Conclusions:</b>
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38. SAfE continues to play an integral role in the Surrey school landscape working in partnership with schools, the Local Authority and others and drawing on the collective strengths to ensure that every child has access to an excellent education. A clear strength of the education partnership is the ability to sustain the collaborative working of the Surrey family of schools regardless of status or phase – to retain a clear sense of place.

39. The last year has been incredibly challenging for schools who have been doing an extraordinary job. Overall provision and outcomes for pupils in Surrey remains some of the highest in the country. However, SAfE's risk assessment shows some significant vulnerabilities for schools particularly in the light of the COVID crisis.

40. The pandemic has exacerbated some of the learning gaps for the most disadvantaged pupils. SAfE is continuing to support schools to ameliorate the COVID gap ensuring that approaches align with Pupil Premium strategies and wider school improvement priorities.

## Recommendations:

41. The Select Committee note the work that SAfE has made over the last term particularly supporting schools through the COVID-19 pandemic.
42. That the Select Committee note the on-going support to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
43. The mitigations to address the issues identified by the risk assessment process are embedded and monitored by SAfE and the Local Authority.

## Next steps

44. Receive an update on SAfE's work in Summer 2021 in particular on:
  - Improvements in vulnerable schools
  - Improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
  - Impact of COVID-19

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### Report Contact details

Maria Dawes, CEO Schools Alliance for Excellence

m.dawes@schoolsallexcel.com

### Sources/background papers

Annex 1 – Strategic Plan

Annex 2 - Key Stage 4 + 5 Summary Nov 2020

Annex 3 - Ameliorating the COVID Gap and supporting schools

Annex 4 - SI & Risk assessment

Annex 5 - Vulnerable groups