

# People and Health Overview Committee

## 17 October 2023

### Report on the Dorset Education Board

#### For Review and Consultation

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Brief Summary:**

The local authority's statutory responsibilities for educational excellence are set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. A local authority must promote high standards in education. This duty is discharged within the context of increasing autonomy, changing accountability for schools and the expectation that schools themselves should lead improvement.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 was amended by the Education and Adoption Act 2016, whereby intervention can be taken by the Secretary of State when a school is underperforming.

Just over a third of our schools are maintained, with two-thirds now academies and more schools planning to join trusts as the current expectation is that all schools should academise by 2030. There are currently 18 different academies in Dorset. Many of our maintained schools express feeling very satisfied with support from the local authority. We have one free school in the Dorchester Locality. This is funded by government but is not managed by the local authority and does not have to follow the national curriculum. There are two colleges, providing further education, one of which includes a higher education element.

The Dorset Education Board has identified priorities and developed plans to continuously improve the education of children and young people and to achieve our aspiration of Best Education for All. Activity initiated through the board has started to make a positive difference for children and young people.

**Recommendation:**

Members of the committee are invited to comment on the progress made and impact of the work of The Dorset Education Board.

**Reason for Recommendation:**

Education in Dorset plays a significant role in helping us achieve our Council Plan. High quality education can help to drive economic prosperity through increasing social mobility and creating a skilled workforce for the future. Education settings can also play a pivotal leadership role and be at the heart of the communities they serve, supporting community cohesion and connection. The delivery of an exciting curriculum that enables children and young people to love the place they live and benefit from our wonderful natural environment can be achieved through the strong leadership of our education community.

**1. Ofsted Outcomes – Good and better**

1.1 In academic year 2022/23, Ofsted outcomes improved, with more schools in Dorset now graded Good or better. Schools have risen to the challenge of a robust inspection framework to support this improving picture. The local authority has provided direct and detailed support through advice, guidance, and information to support self-evaluation and school improvement. As a result, 84% of schools in Dorset are now Good or Better (compared to 88% nationally). Of these, 86% are maintained schools and 81% are academies. In August 2022 (prior to the start of last academic year) Dorset was 78% and National 88%, so this represents a marked improvement.

**2. Attainment and Progress**

2.1 In November 2022 the board was presented with provisional outcomes from the summer test and assessments. When compared to pre-pandemic outcomes primary assessments in Dorset had higher rankings when compared to other local authorities. However, in some cases, weaknesses in outcomes prior to the pandemic had worsened. The board considered the relative position for 2022, and how outcomes had changed since 2019.

- 2.2 Assessments at early primary stages were above national, but Key Stage 2 (Year 6) was shown to remain a concern, with outcomes below national. 55% of Dorset children achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, compared to 59% nationally.
- 2.3 Key Stage 4 tests at Secondary showed results broadly in line with national averages, although the numbers achieving higher grades was below national. Destinations of pupils were considered, with the types of destinations tending to reflect the nature of the options available in a rural county where transport is a contributing factor.
- 2.4 In January 2023 the board was presented with further detail and analysis. There was a focus on outcomes for groups of pupils including pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and those eligible for free school meals. This group tends to underperform nationally, but this is a particular issue in Dorset. The gap between those eligible and those not eligible was shown to have increased to levels similar to those ten years ago.
- 2.5 In March 2023 the board was presented with a deep dive on Key Stage 2. Dorset has some of the lowest outcomes at Key Stage 2 of all local authorities, and this has been the case for some time. Some of the underlying issues such as Middle Schools were discussed before moving onto specific subjects and groups of pupils. There was a particular focus on the performance of girls in maths, which was widened to include low progress figures at key Stage 4.
- 2.6 A task and finish group dedicated to improving attainment outcomes for girls in Maths has been established and we are implementing a robust plan for this academic year for improvement of mathematical teaching and learning for girls of all ages, with the aim of sustaining strong attainment for boys and of improving outcomes in maths overall.
- 2.7 Further work has commenced and will be undertaken in academic year 2023/24 to improve attainment for all and narrow the gap for children who are disadvantaged. We are fortunate that some schools in Dorset work well with their communities and enhance outcomes for children and we will continue to draw on great practice. In some areas more focused work is required.
- 2.8 A particular example of focused work is in Weymouth and Portland where we have a dedicated project with all headteachers across primary and secondary and including Weymouth College, to agree key areas of focus to help improve children's achievements. This group of headteachers are

particularly interested in schools being at the hearts of the communities they serve and want to work to make generational positive change and to improve social mobility. We have commenced work with nationally renowned organisations including Challenge Partners and the Buckinghamshire Challenge (Marc Rowland, Deputy Director of the National Education Trust and recognised expert on the Pupil Premium) to develop a plan specific to Weymouth and Portland.

- 2.9 We are also working with the Department for Education on agreeing an enhanced and formal approach to supporting and challenging our Multi-Academy Trusts across Dorset. We have high expectations of all providers to enable our children to achieve through experiencing an enriching and engaging education.
- 2.10 Results for summer 2023 are currently being ratified and finalised. Early indications are that outcomes for our children remain below where they should be. At this stage we are assured the focus of the board is right and that our plans are well placed. We do not underestimate the significant leadership and improvement needed across the education community. Our strategy to draw on and share the best practice in the county as well as best national and international practice, is the right ambition for our children and young people.
- 2.11 The Education Strategy, to be published in January 2024, will ensure all priority areas of work are underpinned by plans to ensure we deliver our aspirations as set out in the Children, Young People and Families Plan.

### **3 Attendance**

- 3.1 The board have been notified of absence rates over the academic year, with a notable rise in absence, and also a doubling of the numbers of children and young people with persistent absence (i.e. missing 10% or more of sessions), and severe absence (missing 50% or more of sessions). This information was shared alongside a presentation on the importance of good attendance, how it was linked to good outcomes (and thus life chances), but also how important good attendance was in relation to social and emotional development. The board also agreed that attendance supports safety.
- 3.2 We have developed an Attendance Strategy which has been used as an exemplar by the Department for Education. An Attendance Working Group has been established to support improved educational attendance in our county. We have undertaken round tables in all localities and have seen

an improvement across first /primary / middle schools but not yet a real improvement across secondary / upper schools. We will continue to develop practice to improve attendance in education.

#### **4. Student Pledge**

- 4.1 Our student pledge, to be published in January 2024 has been supported by our educational settings enabling us to have conversations with children and young people. Stephen Twigg (Independent Chair of the Dorset Education Board), Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning) and Hanna Baxter (Youth Voice Officer) have visited a range of schools and settings to gather information about children's lived experiences in their communities and in school. We also spoke to children who are young carers, members of youth parliament and youth council and children who are electively home educated. In addition to this, our annual Takeover Challenge provided opportunities for hearing directly from children and young people.
- 4.2 Children and young people described their need to experience a deep sense of belonging in school and in the places they live, grow and learn. They need to feel listened to by emotionally available adults and for adults to understand the unique experiences and gifts they bring to the communities they are part of. They need to be able to share worries and feel safe, wherever they are, and wish to be able explore and express their identity and celebrate their cultural heritage. They would like their emotional wellbeing to be strongly supported and they feel safest when adults supporting them are professionally confident and competent.

#### **5. Workforce Pledge**

- 5.1 We have created a task and finish group to develop a Workforce Pledge to understand the needs of the workforce within the education community of Dorset and to establish a plan to address workforce wellbeing, continuous professional development for excellent teaching and learning and recruitment and retention. The board wish to celebrate the joy of being part of an education community and the privilege of being able to support learning.
- 5.2 Members of the board have shared experiences of recruiting and retaining employees in key posts such as learning assistants, maths teachers and, in some areas of the county, headteachers.

- 5.3 They have also shared that the emotional wellbeing of employees is of paramount importance. A confident and resilient workforce is needed to meet the needs of children and families, in the wider context of covid recovery, cost of living and a rise in special educational needs.
- 5.4 The board heard from a local occupational therapist and educator, Caroline Essame, who has worked across the world in clinical practice and educational development. Her determination is to enhance workforce wellbeing through evidence-based approaches to workforce development and reminds us that playfulness and fun is at the heart of highly effective education systems.
- 5.5 At our annual conference in June, Mary Myatt was a keynote speaker. Mary is an education adviser, author, former teacher and inspector who has written extensively about school leadership and the curriculum. As part of her work with us, Mary is providing curriculum tools to our maintained schools. We have also selected schools who may benefit from access to these materials, to enhance the outcomes for children and young people. We do this in negotiation with the DFE and the academy trust or school. We believe such materials are key to enabling the education workforce to provide high quality teaching and learning in our schools.

## **6. The Dorset Curriculum**

- 6.1 In 2019 “An Unequal Playing Field” was published by the Social Mobility Commission. It reported on the benefits of extra-curricular activities for children and demonstrated the inequity of access to such activities. We want all of our children to have culturally rich and rewarding experiences, drawing on the beautiful natural environment in Dorset. Our children and young people have told us that, in addition to formal learning, they welcome experiences that enable them to live independently and feel confident about adult life. They enjoy opportunities to make friends and socialise in non-formal settings, to escape pressures and have fun. The board is committed to establishing a Dorset Curriculum that will enable every single child and young person in Dorset access to a menu of experiences.

## **7. Belonging**

- 7.1 The board hear regular reports on suspensions and permanent exclusions. Both had reduced during the pandemic and after lockdown but are now on the rise. As such, the board is focused on children remaining

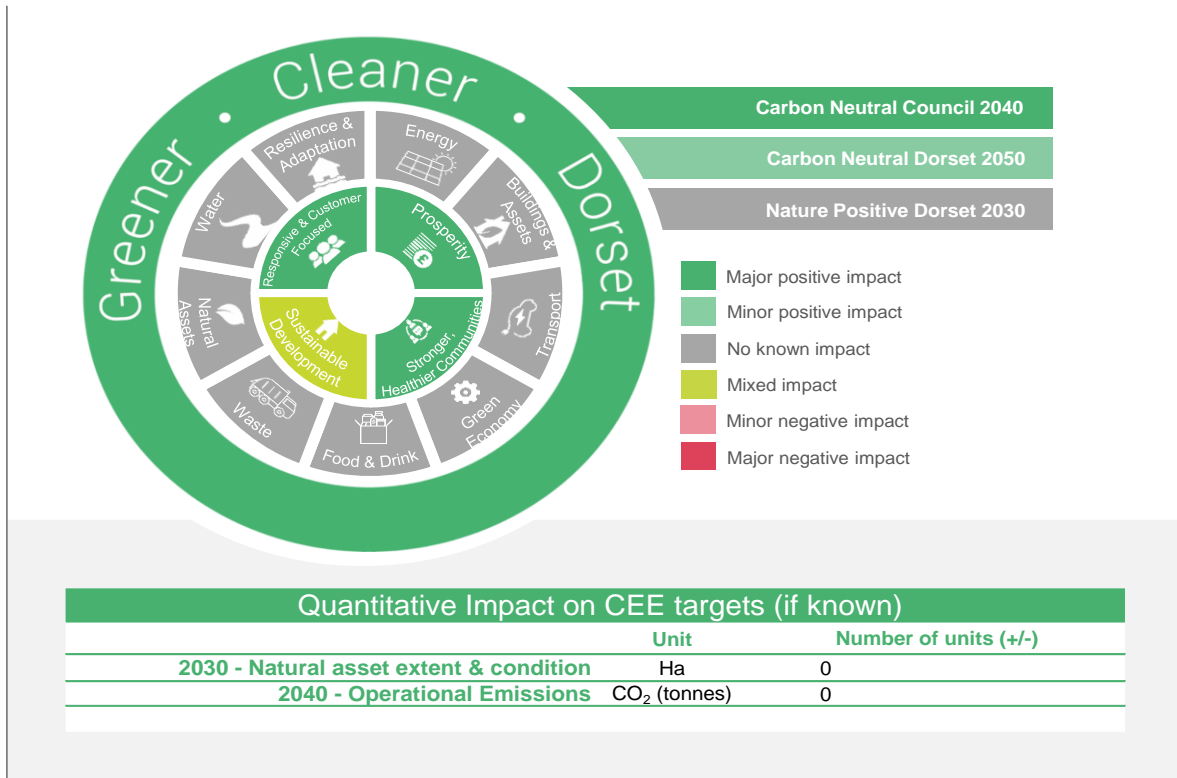
in school and being supported to regulate their emotions and communicate their needs, and for adults to understand and provide for their needs with confidence, drawing on evidence-based practice. Our commitment to Therapeutic Thinking will see an increase in educational settings accessing this training. All children's services staff will also undertake the training.

- 7.2 In June 2023, we held our annual conference on the theme of "Belonging". The board commissioned a film which shows young people describing what helps them to feel they belong. A feeling of safety, caring teachers, family and friends are at the heart of what enables children and young people to experience a deep sense of belonging.
- 7.3 In October we will launch our Belonging Strategy. This has been co-produced with children, young people, schools, parents and carers and key partners. The strategy will set out how we will enable all children and young people to feel they belong to their community and their place of learning.
- 7.4 Our Local Alliance Groups have been awarding grants to promote inclusion and belonging of children and young people in school and in communities, through the Covid Outbreak Management Fund and we are starting to see a positive difference for children and families. Examples of funding include walking buses in Weymouth, a refurbished classroom at Dorset Hospital for children on Kingfisher Ward that is now an inviting learning environment that enables children to forget they are unwell and learn in a non-clinical but safe environment, and family cooking classes.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Activity undertaken on behalf of the board is supported through existing budgets and does not require additional funding.

## **9. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**



## 10. Well-being and Health Implications

10.1 In supporting the work of the Dorset Education Board, it is likely the wellbeing of children and young people is enhanced through improved educational attainment, better attendance in education and enjoyment of the natural environment as well as extra-curricular activities.

## 11. Other Implications

None

## 12. Risk Assessment

12.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

## 13. Equalities Impact Assessment



- 13.1 As it has been found that certain groups are currently disadvantaged in terms of attendance and educational outcomes, it is implicit in the work of the Dorset Education Board that disadvantage is well understood and that evidence-based and innovative practice is enabled to address inequality.

## **14 Appendices**

- 14.1 None

## **15 Background Papers**

- 15.1 People and Health Overview Committee: March 24<sup>th</sup> 2022 - Education Leadership Board available at :  
<https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=652&MId=5102>
- 15.2 Cabinet: April 2022 – Education Leadership Board available at:  
<https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s29048/Education%20Leadership%20Board%20Recommendation.pdf>