



Now is the Time:

Reading Borough Council's strategy for the future educational success of our students

Executive Summary



'If you treat people as they are, you will be instrumental in keeping them where they are. If you treat them as they could be, you will help them become what they ought to be.'

Goethe

Our aims for the future

We aspire to reach a place where all our children and young people have the best educational opportunities we can jointly provide, and where they are well prepared as young adults to contribute successfully to our community as responsible and caring citizens. We look to all our children and young people accessing high quality education and learning delivered through high quality schools and partner providers.

We aim that:

- All children, including the disadvantaged and those with additional learning needs, achieve well and have the right, and the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge they need to become responsible adults and contribute to the future economic and cultural growth of the community;
- All children and young people are treated fairly, and that their individual needs are understood and met through the co-ordinated efforts of all involved in their education and care;
- Pupils with challenging behaviours are supported through a therapeutic approach to meeting their needs and are not excluded from the very education and support they need to achieve success;
- Schools and settings successfully muster all the resources and capacity to meet the needs of all children, irrespective of their individual circumstances and starting points;
- Intervention and support is targeted where the need is greatest for individual children and young people, but also for the institutions serving them;
- All children and young people are safe and protected, and that those at risk are supported well;
- Parents choose Reading Schools and Academies because of the diversity of provision that meets needs, aspirations and the range of student interests; and
- All our schools, educators and support services have the capacity, expertise and drive to learn from each other and to work collaboratively to challenge, to support and to lead sustainable improvement.

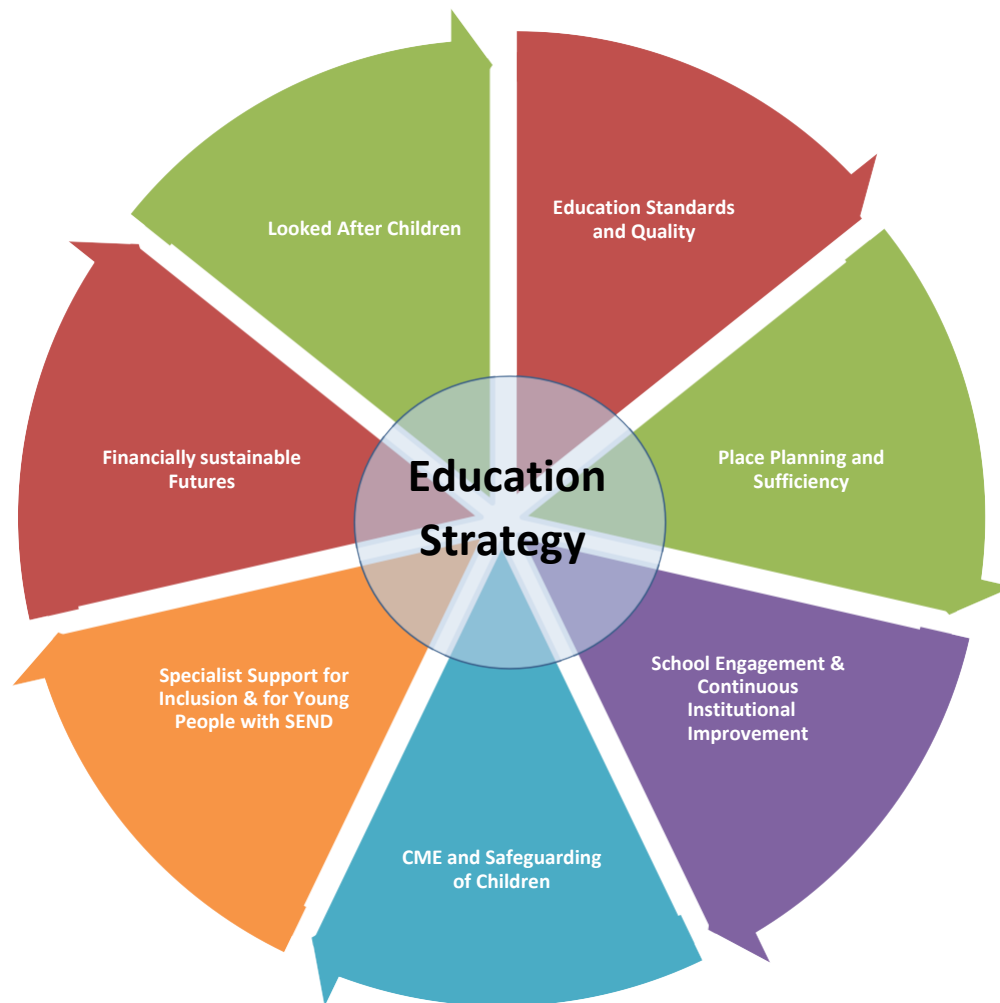
How well do we do against these aims now?

Reading is on a journey and improvement is taking place. Standards in our schools are improving through the early years and in Key Stage 1 albeit slowly. Standards in our secondary schools at Key Stage 4 and 5 continue to be among the highest in the country, but these figures mask weaknesses in the progress made by pupils where Reading schools overall are below average for the progress made. The proportion of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) is reducing but, in an area of high employment, we still have 3.2% of young people who do not access employment or training. Our End of Key Stage 2 outcomes for pupils are not good enough, particularly for those middle attaining children and for those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Reading Borough is in the bottom quartile nationally with respect of social mobility with disadvantaged pupils being far less likely to leave school with the qualifications they need to access employment and move from the poverty trap many find themselves in.

The proportion of pupils identified as having additional learning needs is increasing, as is the proportion of pupils with SEND being excluded from our schools. Over 2500 days were lost by pupils in Reading schools through fixed term exclusions in 2017-18. The number of incidents involving the exclusion of children on EHCPs more than doubled to 218 in 2017-18. Thirty eight Reading children were permanently excluded from schools in 2018. Where do they go from here? What future is there for these children and young people?

Where we know things need to improve, we can also see successes across our schools and local authority. Our able pupils achieve well at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards overall by the end of Key Stage 4 are very high. Our looked after children (LAC) achieve well and many make good gains in very challenging circumstances. Ofsted inspections over the last academic year have been positive overall and have confirmed the good work taking place in many of our schools and academies.

There is now the right time to pull together a longer term strategy to guide our journey of improvement to help us achieve our ambitions and aims for the children and families of Reading. Our Education Strategy to help achieve these goals and to support our partners to secure sustainable education and improvement for the future covers seven key areas, these being:



Our Key Priorities

Our key priorities are drawn from our core data on how well the local authority performs for its children and young people. They take on the statutory role of the local authority in championing standards and quality, and also our role in helping to build a sustainable future for education in the Borough. Building capacity, strengthening the mechanism and systems that ensure schools can share expertise and support and challenge each other, and ensuring that we have the right provision in the right place for the right children, is core to what we must achieve as a local authority.

Change and improvement is not the responsibility of individuals. Our strategy recognises that the improvements we need to see, and to which we aspire, can only be made through partnership with all the key players involved in changing the lives of children and young people. Reading believes in the power of partnership working, in openness and transparency, but also in the right to challenge each other where we feel more needs to be done, and where communication and joint working is not in the best interests of our children and young people. We all have our part to play in this.

We have many strengths within our Borough. We need to build on these and our Education Strategy aims to strengthen our reserve and partnerships to collectively make the difference we need to make at a time when schools, local authorities and finances are all under pressure.

The demography of Reading continues to change and, in some key areas, population growth continues to add pressure to a school system that, in some areas, is already at capacity. Pupil place planning and SEND place planning continues to work to increase capacity in the right places and for the right reasons.

Responding to the Priorities

In responding to the challenges and working towards these key goals, we have already begun work on developing and implementing key actions to support our schools and settings in rising to the challenges we all face, and in contributing to a successful future for the young people of Reading.

What will be different and what we will expect to see over the coming year?

Our key strategic priorities and actions for the coming year are outlined below. These are the strategic priorities and actions that schools and our partners will see taking place over the next year as a start towards supporting our community in making the changes we need to see that will bring dividends to the children and young people of Reading. We cannot achieve these in isolation but reach out to strengthen our partnership working with schools, Multi-Academy Trusts, and all our partners to ensure a co-ordinated and seamless approach to improvement.

The following provide a brief overview of the key initiatives and developments that will shape our actions and practice to build the foundations of a longer-term growth within our education system in Reading.

Educational Standards and Quality:

Restructuring our School Improvement and Schools Causing Concern Strategy.

Key headlines include

- Transparent use of information and data to engage those schools where we need to focus additional support
- Introducing an additional category of 'Intensive Support' with clear intervention
- Reducing the termly SSO visit to schools that are good and outstanding and replacing one of these visits with a group focus with external input and challenge, with active school to school working
- Greater transparency and joint working with the Regional Schools Commissioner with academies and free schools

Commissioning additional expertise to support in key areas.

Key headlines include

- External commissioning of the leadership of an outstanding school to support inclusion and curriculum development
- Continued work with the Pan Berkshire Voice 21 project
- Commissioning through our Teaching School to support maths and school to school support

Re-starting the Early Years Network and Primary SEND Network

Key headlines include

- Facilitating and supporting termly networks with key agenda items and linking it to capacity building and co-ordinator capacity and expertise

Establishing a new approach to reducing NEETs

Key headlines include

- Re-tendering the contract for providing information and guidance for young people at risk of being NEET
- Commissioning providers to reduce the proportion of NEETs through an impact payment mechanism
- Encouraging work placements

Place Planning and Sufficiency

School Organisation Plan

Key headlines include

- Establishing comprehensive 5 year data and sufficiency plan
- Developing localised data at micro level to help schools in budget and sufficiency planning
- Beginning the process towards opening a new 6 form entry secondary school
- Opening a new 2 form entry primary school in Green Park (2019)
- Exploring additional primary places in the central-west primary admissions area
- Developing additional ASD inclusion unit provision in mainstream
- Exploring a new SEND free school
- Expansion and relocation of The Phoenix
- Expansion of The Avenue and Blessed Hugh Farringdon ASD Unit

School Engagement and Continuous Institutional Improvement

Peer Review and Capacity Building

Key headlines include

- Development of the Safeguarding Peer Review Pilot to engage all schools in the Spring 2019
- Curriculum and Inclusion group projects for good and outstanding schools to share and disseminate good practice with opportunities to engage with outstanding schools from out of Borough
- Commissioned engagement of Reading Teaching School in developing the 'Reading Teaching Network'
- Continued briefings for HTs, DSLs, EYs leads and SENCOs
- Development of Peer Reviews and pilot reviews of SEND, Disadvantaged, curriculum and inclusion

Leadership Support and Training

Key headlines include

- Leadership support for new headteachers

Recruitment and Career Progression Planning

Key headlines include

- Establishing a working party of headteachers, our teaching schools and partners, ITT and other providers
- Establishing a strategy for improving teacher staff recruitment and retention in Reading
- Developing an authority and MAT wide strategy for continuous education and training for teachers

CME and Safeguarding Children

Safeguarding and Improving Practice

Key headlines include

- Greater guidance and support in completing the annual LSCB 175 audit
- Peer safeguarding reviews and challenge around the audit /review of safeguarding practice
- Focused sampled safeguarding reviews
- Building capacity of DSLs to undertake safeguarding reviews on the LA's behalf
- HT briefings to have safeguarding focus each time

Children Missing Education

Key headlines include

- Additional focus on part time timetables and greater follow up and communication with schools where children are at risk

Specialist Support for Inclusion and for Young People with SEND

SEND Strategy

Key headlines include

- Securing 2 additional primary mainstream Inclusion units ASD
- The Avenue and Blessed Hugh increasing specialist provision
- Phoenix relocation and expansion to include provision for girls

- Bid for a new SEND Free School in the South/East of Reading
- Additional strategy for supporting SEND pupils at risk of exclusion
- Establishing SEMH hubs and greater outreach for SEMH and ASD
- Development of Reading Therapeutic behaviour approach to support schools in improving behaviour management
- Transition programme for 18+ to transfer to Adults Directorate

Financially sustainable futures

School Organisation Planning

Key headlines include:

- Establishing a working party of headteachers and key stakeholders in modelling different organisation structures for schools and to advise and challenge where schools are facing increased financial pressures and potential deficits

Intervention and support where finances are challenging

Key headlines include:

- Close budget monitoring and identification of schools on track towards deficit
- Tight controls where schools are in deficit with the requirement for agreed recovery plans and close budget monitoring and review
- Providing benchmarking data for schools to compare organisations and costs
- Monitoring recovery plans and school revenue where school budgets are a cause for concern
- Working with nursery schools and children's centres on developing sustainable organisations
- Intervening with LA powers to withdraw delegation where financial concerns are not addressed effectively

Looked After Children

Development of the Virtual School

Key headlines include:

- Restructuring the Virtual School team in line with the changes in responsibility to also cover previously LAC
- Improving outcomes for LAC by narrowing the gap, raising aspiration and effectively deploying PPG
- Expanding the Virtual School team in line with changes to the statutory duty for LAC which has extended to cover PLAC
- Closer partnership between Virtual School, SEND and Children's Services for placement of LAC to ensure cohesion, continuity and stability
- Develop systems to capture progress data from schools to analyse progress made by children not at the end of the key stage phase
- Work with key professionals to identify and implement targeted interventions for social, emotional and mental health issues in order to address barriers to learning and under achievement.