



12 July 2023

Title	Annual School Standards and Achievement Report 2021-2022
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Brian Grady, Director of Education
Lead councillor	Ruth McEwan, Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health
Corporate priority	Inclusive Economy
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the position regarding school standards and attainment as set out in the attached report 2. Endorse the priorities and current and planned activity to further improve attainment, with a focus on priority groups 3. To receive further reports in the forthcoming academic year on progress of actions and impact on standards and attainment

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. Education is a strategic priority for Reading Borough Council. The Annual School Standards report sets out how Brighter Futures for Children, on behalf of Reading Borough Council, supports statutory duties regarding education and school standards in support of Reading Borough Council strategic priorities and policies. It uses verified examination data and so relates to the previous (21/22) academic year, not the current academic year.
- 1.2. Schools are implementing research informed approaches to improve standards, with most schools being judged positively by Ofsted and in findings from school effectiveness assurance activities. However, these actions are not closing gaps with national performance quickly enough.
- 1.3. This is the first period for three years where attainment data has been published and it paints a picture of concern – with children clearly impacted from the loss of schooling during the period of the pandemic. Though this is a national issue, Reading seems to have performed more poorly in headline measures at KS1 and KS2.
- 1.4. Outcomes for Children Looked After and for bilingual children categorised as having English as an Additional Language are stronger, with performance at or above national averages for these groups. This reflects the success of long-term work of the Virtual School and projects to support language and communication in schools.
- 1.5. However, overall performance for disadvantaged pupils and pupils at risk of poor outcomes need to be improved and gaps reduced. Particular areas of concern include children with or who have ever had a social worker, who underperform compared to their peers in most schools; and analysis of outcomes by pupil ethnicity has identified that children with Black Caribbean Heritage are underperforming in Reading schools.

- 1.6. The report identifies actions being taken in the current academic year, which are expanded on in this cover report. A particular area of focus in the coming year will be improving school leadership capacity through developing school to school support structures and building stronger partnerships and federations between schools, overseen by the newly constituted Education Partnership Board.
- 1.7. The intention is to present this report on an annual basis to ACE Committee to track improvements in school standards and pupil attainment, with further reports to committee focusing on key areas of priority action through the academic year.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
 - Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 2.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
 - People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others
- 2.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective, and economical.
- 2.4. The Council Corporate Plan sets out our ambition as "a town where everyone can access education, skills and training and good jobs and where child poverty is eradicated... by Enhancing education, skills and training opportunities, particularly for our more vulnerable residents"

3. Overview of school standards and attainment

- 3.1. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Academy Trusts, school governing boards and their executive leaders are ultimately accountable for the standards and achievement in their schools. The roles and responsibilities of BFfC on behalf of Reading Borough Council are:
 - a) To act as the champion for all children and young people in the borough but especially those who are: Looked After by the local authority, have additional educational needs, are from a minority group that experiences institutional and societal discrimination, have a social worker, are a survivor of trauma and/or have physical or mental health needs.
 - b) Understand the performance of maintained schools in their area, using data as a starting point to identify any that are underperforming, while working with them to explore ways to support progress.
 - c) To be responsible for maintaining an overview of the effectiveness of all schools including academies, free schools, local colleges, registered early years settings and registered training providers.
 - d) To identify schools causing concern and to rapidly intervene where a school is at risk of decline or failing standards, working closely with the DfE Regional Director,

diocese, and other local partners to ensure schools receive the support they need to improve.

- e) Encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement; support other schools and enable other schools to access the support they need to improve.
- f) Exercise relevant powers to intervene in locally maintained schools causing concern and to work with the Department for Education Regional Director where there are concerns about school effectiveness in academy schools and settings

3.2. **National Context:** School standards and attainment in Reading are impacted by national and local context. The annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (November 2022) identifies challenges being experienced by schools and pupils nationally, which are reflected in the local Reading context.

3.3. **Continued impact of the pandemic:** Children nationally are not catching up quickly enough and gaps have widened as a result of the pandemic despite efforts across the system, particularly for groups at risk of poor outcomes. This national experience reflects the picture we see locally. Many Reading schools have adapted their curriculum to consider the foundational knowledge needed to support recovery, however, some schools need to make swifter progress in securing curriculum understanding at the subject leader level and therefore some curricula need strengthening. Writing is of particular concern locally. Progress on developing consistent curriculum quality is being hampered locally by capacity, particularly in smaller schools and schools with higher numbers of children with more complex needs. Most schools are providing additional tutoring and intervention to help children catch up. This is most effective in early reading. Our work to secure a common local understanding of curriculum quality and how to achieve this is increasingly embedded and many schools are engaged and participating in our curriculum development projects.

3.4. **Significant developmental delays in early years** – including language and communication, emotional regulation, and socialisation. A good start is more vital than ever. Most Reading leaders in Nursery and reception have adapted their curriculum thinking to meet needs and there is a good understanding of how to support Speech and Language development as a result of long-term projects in early language development and oracy. Leaders report that more and more children are presenting with complex needs in the areas identified and support does not always meet demand. The REYS Federation have been selected for a national support role as a "Stronger Practice Hub" for early years which will provide opportunities for support both to maintained schools and Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector early years providers going forward. Primary schools need to adapt their curriculum to overtly teach vocabulary and Oracy skills for longer and ensure they can offer research-informed interventions and adapted curricula for children with significant delays. Oracy project work is well established in some schools and has had a strong impact where schools are engaging in the offered programmes.

3.5. **School resilience and school leader's wellbeing.** School leaders nationally and locally are reporting that the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on pupils' lives and school staff. School leaders report rises in staff absence and difficulty recruiting. These issues are compounding the challenges post-pandemic and are testing the resilience of schools. Effective local recruitment, training and retention of school staff will be vital if recovery is to be secured. In discussions with school leaders and governors, concerns about Headteacher and staff wellbeing are being raised. Heads across all sectors tell us about the operational demand placed on them by increased pressure to meet the criteria in the Ofsted Framework while meeting significantly increased SEND and mental health needs. This includes, for many, increased mobility and in-year admissions of children from outside the UK with SEND and significant learning gaps. There is significant local appetite from school leaders to develop a strategy to build and enhance

- school leadership sustainability, with a Reading-wide approach to workforce and to wellbeing.
- 3.6. **Pupil behaviour** has been more challenging than pre-pandemic. Nationally, exclusions and suspensions have increased. Emotionally based school avoidance is contributing to a national challenge of declining school attendance. Exclusions are increasing locally, and a few schools exclude far more than local averages. Progress has been made by working with schools to commission new Alternative Provision (AP) and improve existing AP; this is an area that remains an area of high priority
 - 3.7. **The national SEND system experiencing challenges of increasing demand and expertise and staff shortages**, leading to delays in early identification, access to provision and progress for individual children. The availability of services to support the identification of needs and provide advice and provision (such as speech and language therapy) is poor, further impacting equity for children with additional need. The June 2021 joint CQC /Ofsted area inspection of SEND in Reading evidenced an inclusive system. Reading was not required to produce a written statement of action in the SEND area inspection, and we have done much to increase specialist provision in the last year. However, as the report sets out, many Reading schools have high numbers of children with SEND, which raises capacity challenges. There is also local frustration and concern about their capacity to effectively include increasing numbers of children with complex SEND. Reading is participating in the DfE sponsored Delivering Better Value in SEND programme, with a grant submission being planned to DfE in the coming months to increase investment in SEND capacity for mainstream schools.
 - 3.8. The Annual School Standards report 2021-2022 confirms the priorities to improve school standards and attainment for 2022-2025, which are reflected within the Brighter Futures for Children Business Plan Priority 4: *influencing and supporting education settings to offer high quality inclusive teaching and learning to support achievement for all*. More detail on the activity involved in these priorities is set out below.
 - 3.9. **Priority 1: Developing school-to school support and challenge through the Education Partnership Board**
 - 3.10. Leadership capacity in schools needs to be supported and enhanced to deliver the improved outcomes we wish to see. National systems to establish teaching school and subject networks have faltered due to changing government priorities and the Thames Valley is poorly served by the teaching school network. Reading does not benefit from this school-to-school support and infrastructure, with no local DfE funded Teaching School Hub (the nearest is based in Sough) and DfE funded maths and English hubs in Wokingham. We also do not have a local school improvement partner organisation for schools to commission.
 - 3.11. We are beginning to make progress in improving school leadership capacity through developing school to school support; encouraging local federation of schools and clusters of schools working together to build stronger partnerships. This work will be overseen by the newly constituted Education Partnership Board, which commenced in March 2023. Developing school to school support networks and a local infrastructure of school support will be key areas of work over the coming academic years.
 - 3.12. The Education Partnership Board membership comprises early years, primary and secondary school leader and governors, with representatives from Reading Governors Association, Reading Primary Heads Association, Reading Secondary and College Leaders and is chaired by the Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children. The remit of this new Board is to engage all Reading schools in the leadership and oversight of the local school system, to develop shared responsibility for the outcomes for Reading children. The Partnership Board have a shared ambition to make Reading a town where education is invested in, celebrated, and promoted, by the Local Authority, all schools and settings, businesses, cultural organisations and the community.
 - 3.13. The Board acts in an advisory role, championing educational excellence in the local school system, promoting improvement and high standards, underpinning fair access

for all young people and the promotion of wellbeing and mental health. In pursuit of this goal the Board will provide leadership and accountability for the Reading schools system, by:

- a) Promoting high standards of teaching and learning to fulfil every child's potential and ensure their achievement.
- b) Being outcomes focused and evidence and research informed; utilising the best thinking and evidence to improve the quality and standards of education in Reading and supporting improved outcomes for Reading children.
- c) Celebrating the excellence in Reading schools, supporting all schools to benefit from the excellence in our local education system.
- d) Promoting wellbeing of all school leaders, staff, and pupils in Reading, including their mental, emotional and physical health.
- e) Contributing to setting the strategic direction and priorities for the future of the local education system.
- f) Supporting and challenging the local system to ensure inclusive access across all schools for all pupils

3.14. The Board has high ambition to make a positive difference for Reading children. The Board will develop in the first year a performance and impact dashboard, capturing the Key Performance Indicators for the Board and for our local education system, which will demonstrate priority areas for support and action and evidence the difference we make as a collective group of system leaders.

3.15. Priority 2: Promotion of positive wellbeing for school leaders and school staff

3.16. Whilst there is a range of wellbeing support available to school leaders and schools in Reading, including for community-maintained school the Employee Assistance Programme and the Educational Psychology Service and a commissioned group support offer for all local leaders, there is a collective will to respond to the stress and impact being experienced by schools and school leaders by collectively doing more.

3.17. The Education Partnership Board is undertaking a school leader wellbeing survey this term and consulting with school leaders to identify the elements of most pressure and most need to inform a Reading Wellbeing offer for all schools and school leaders, regardless of form of governance. A draft wellbeing plan will be completed by the end of the summer term 2023 for launch in the new academic year.

3.18. Priority 3: Targeting of intervention and support to raise standards and progress of pupils at schools with the poorest results, informed by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of inequalities outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

3.19. The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness sets out how BFfC discharges duties on behalf of Reading Borough Council, primarily through the School Effectiveness Service, to target support to schools which need support to improve standards and attainment. Work to influence the local system is based on long-term projects that support schools to effectively implement research-based approaches in their schools; to ensure that every school has in place strategies that will make the most difference according to research in improving equity, inclusion, and outcomes, with a focus on those groups of pupils at greatest risk of poor outcomes.

3.20. The approach to working with schools is set out in the School Effectiveness Framework for Reading. This framework recognises that school leaders have the expertise and experience to support school improvement, and that collaborative school-led partnerships are a key feature of local education provision with improvement being driven by local schools. Where intervention is needed in schools to bring about rapid

improvement, BfC commissions and brokers school-to-school support wherever this is possible. Targeted support and school effectiveness projects are provided to support improvement in outcomes identified by data and through school effectiveness activities across the academic year.

- 3.21. School Effectiveness approaches are informed by longitudinal research from Ofsted and The Education Endowment Foundation focused on what makes the most difference in raising attainment for disadvantaged groups at risk of poor outcomes. The evidence recommends:
- a) A high-quality, broad and balanced curriculum that outlines what children should, know, remember and be able to do at each key endpoint underpins educational achievement for all
 - b) High-quality teaching is the best and most effective intervention for all children but is essential for children with additional needs and vulnerabilities
 - c) Inclusive environments where all children thrive underpin good community relations, safeguard children, encourage coproduction with parents and help secure ambitious outcomes for children with additional needs and vulnerabilities
 - d) Where pupils require additional intervention to keep up with the curriculum these should be research-informed, implemented rigorously and regularly evaluated for impact
 - e) Children with poor attendance are unlikely to achieve well so good attendance is prioritised
- 3.22. Many of our most vulnerable children and those with SEND have differences which impact their attentional skills and processing function in working memory. For these children, the quality of curriculum intent (what is taught, how it is sequenced and how it is assessed) makes a significant difference. Our long-term curriculum training offer and assurance curriculum reviews have been designed to support and challenge leaders' understanding of curriculum design and ensure it meets the quality of education criteria in the Ofsted Education Inspection framework. All Reading community schools are attending training and undergoing curriculum reviews in 2023/24.
- 3.23. How the curriculum is implemented for pupils with SEND also makes a difference. We have provided training for local schools to help them to further develop pedagogical tools to support novice and SEND learners to access whole class, teacher-led instruction, and practice. We have highlighted that the outcome of any support or scaffold should be increased independence and readiness for the next phase in the child's life. Rosenshine's principles of instruction offer a systematic approach to reducing cognitive load and improving recall. In classrooms where pedagogy follows these principles novice learners with SEND are given the support and scaffolding, they need to retain knowledge in long-term memory. In schools that are embedding these approaches children with SEND often feel more confident and as clever as their peers. The vast majority of schools have had training in these approaches and are involved in a two-year project with national leader Tom Sherington to implement instructional coaching in their schools
- 3.24. Positive impact of this work is being seen in the securing of positive inspection outcomes in schools and nurseries for quality of curriculum. Working with middle leaders on curriculum has improved confidence and is driving our network and school-to-school support
- 3.25. Language, communication and reading fluency are the building blocks of access to knowledge. BfC have provided support and signposting to develop excellence in these areas in early years and primary settings. Schools and settings have the ambition that all pupils with SEND have effective oracy and communication skills and achieve reading fluency as soon as possible. BfC have worked with 15 schools to implement the Oracy project with national leaders Voice 21 and have undertaken reading curriculum reviews in all community schools. The vast majority of locally maintained schools buy into

reading project networks and targeted support has and is being provided to schools with weak outcomes in early communication and language and early reading.

- 3.26. Positive impact of this work is being evidenced with early reading identified as a strength in inspection outcomes and reading and phonics outcomes improving. System leadership in oracy and early language has supported a local primary school to achieve a national Oracy award and our Nursery Federation being identified as a national hub
- 3.27. We recognise that for some children in Reading their differences and or their life experiences make it harder for them to self-regulate in the sometimes-overwhelming environment of the classroom. Dysregulation (be that externalised or internalised) significantly impacts cognitive load and working memory. Dysregulated children can find it difficult to learn and sometimes impact the learning of others. Our approach to pedagogy and our therapeutic approach to behaviour and relationships aim to support schools to identify the experiences causing dysregulation and identify the experiences that will support children to better regulate and better learn. Many of our most vulnerable children have had or do have reduced opportunities to be physically active. Our Move More physical participation project supports schools to develop active participation on the way to school, and throughout the school day and helps them to support children's mental and physical health through increased physical activity. In partnership with the RBC Transport Team school streets have been established and more children walk or cycle to school. We have established strong links with Get Berkshire Active which has supported schools to secure funding for mental and physical health initiatives and we have a school-based lead practitioner in place who has worked to re-establish Move More networks and school-to-school sports participation.
- 3.28. Positive impact of this focus has been evidenced in behaviour and personal development being identified as a strength at most school inspections.
- 3.29. In addition to the above, we are working to support the schools workforce to improve their confidence in recognising and responding to institutional and systemic dismantling racism in schools, tackling sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour and supporting children with autism and processing differences. Anti-racist training has been provided for schools, governors and Headteachers and anti-racist lead practitioners are supporting individual schools. Our growth approach to autism and AET training offer is intended to improve provision and access for autistic learners and support workforce confidence in "good autism practice". Schools are developing action plans to embed anti-racist approaches and AET quality frameworks and quality-assured provision in lead practitioner schools will enable these schools to act as system leaders for school-to-school support.
- 3.30. Reading Borough Council has provided additional funding through Covid recovery funding to enable primary and secondary schools to run summer programmes this year, as part of school's collective action to respond to 'lost learning,' with a particular focus to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people receive additional support to enable them to fulfil their potential. Plans are in place across Reading primary and secondary schools to deliver an enhanced response for Year 5, 6 and Year 7 pupils this summer, centred on subsidised summer-based activities. Latest outcomes data as set out in the attached Annual School Standards report have informed this targeted approach and the impact of this programme will be evaluated in the autumn term.
- 3.31. Priority 4: Building governor capacity, skills and oversight to enhance support and challenge**
- 3.32. BFfC provides a governor service traded offer which provides governor hub support, training for clerks and new governors, bi-termly newsletters, training for chairs of governors through Director's briefings. Training provided through the SLA is complemented and extended through the local Reading Governors Association (RGA).

Members of the RGA Board sit on the Education Partnership Board and provide a complementary training offer.

3.33. Work is underway to expand dedicated and on-going communications and marketing support to drive recruitment, retention and capacity in governance particularly to improve diversity in governance and to enhance school to school support and challenge, including peer review and monitoring of governance.

3.34. Priority 5: Implementing a Borough-wide teaching staff recruitment and retention strategy

3.35. Schools are responsible for their recruitment and retention of their staff, but in common with a number of other areas, schools working separately in Reading is not achieving the results that a more collective approach might take.

3.36. The Education Partnership Board is facilitating a more strategic focus on priorities for recruitment of school staff. Proposed areas of focus include removing barriers to employment to promote diversity and inclusion, review of pay scales, benefits packages, training pathways and partnerships and maximising employment pathways for local residents and young people. Different recruitment strategies across schools for are being considered hard to fill roles such as School Business Managers, school leaders, SENDCOs and SEND more specialist staff with knowledge and skills of SEND.

4. Contribution to strategic aims

4.1. The Council Corporate Plan sets out our ambition as “a town where everyone can access education, skills and training and good jobs and where child poverty is eradicated... by Enhancing education, skills and training opportunities, particularly for our more vulnerable residents”

4.2. The work undertaken on behalf of Reading Borough Council with Reading schools helps secure access to consistently high-quality education for all Reading children, to help them succeed and thrive as full participants in Reading’s inclusive economy.

5. Environmental and climate implications

5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

5.2. Ensuring high quality education available to all residents would be expected to reduce carbon emissions from unnecessary travel. There are no direct environmental and climate implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

6. Community engagement

6.1. As set out in the report above, extensive engagement with schools is critical to deliver improved outcomes for Reading children through a self-improving school to school support system. School leaders are expressing an interest in engaging and developing closer working links with community stakeholders. School leaders will be attending alongside BFfC officers to present this report and to engage further with committee on relevant aspects of the report, including the context of current standards and attainment, and priority improvement actions.

7. Equality impact assessment

7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2. The actions set out in this report are intended to have a differential positive impact on people with protected characteristics, who experience a risk of disproportionately poor educational outcomes: specifically, as identified in the outcomes data on this report: disability, race and sex (gender).

8. Other relevant considerations

8.1. No other relevant considerations have been identified related to this report.

9. Legal implications

9.1. The Education Act (1996) identifies that any child learning within the borough is a Reading pupil regardless of the form of governance of the school. Reading Borough Council (RBC) is therefore responsible for maintaining an overview of the effectiveness of all schools and local education provisions.

9.2. Statutory duties and power are delegated by RBC to BFfC, who undertake the local authority statutory duties (Children Act 2004, 2006) to:

- a) act as the champion for all children and young people in the borough but especially those who are: Looked after by the local authority, have additional educational needs, are from a minority group that experiences institutional and societal discrimination, or have a social worker
- b) be responsible for maintaining an overview of the effectiveness of all schools including academies, free schools, local colleges, registered early years settings and registered training providers.
- c) exercise its education functions to promote high standards
- d) Exercise its powers to intervene in schools causing concern (in line with the DfE Schools Causing Concern 2022 statutory guidance).

10. Financial implications

10.1. With the removal from Local Authorities by HM Government of the School Improvement and Monitoring Brokerage Grant, the work of Brighter Futures for Children with Reading schools to support and challenge improved standards and attainment is funded solely through community and maintained school funding of the Dedicated Schools Grant. There are no direct financial implications regarding this report, which reports on the current funded activity.

11. Timetable for implementation

11.1. Give an indication here of when councillors can expect to see changes and how the project will be managed to implementation. If this is not relevant state: Not applicable.

12. Background papers

12.1. There are no background papers for this report.

Appendices

1. **Annual School Standards Report 2021/2022**