

Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

20 March 2024

Title	Annual School Standards and Achievement Report 2022/2023
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
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 reducing inequalities. 3. Note the Reading Borough Council response to HM Coroner's reg 28 report and actions being taken 4. Endorse the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness 2024-2025, including policy commitments in response to HM Coroner's reg 28 report 5. Support the presentation of a Borough-wide Education Strategy 2024-2030 at a forthcoming ACE Committee.

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 (22/23) academic year, not the current academic year.
- 1.2. This report builds on the School Standards report presented to the July 2023 ACE Committee and the identified strategic priorities set out in that report. The Annual School Standards report 2022/2023 report confirms that 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, schools are not yet closing gaps with national performance quickly enough. Actions taken in the autumn term since the July 2023 report to ACE Committee are set out in this report and form the basis of a proposed Education Strategy, for further consideration by ACE Committee at a future meeting.
- 1.3. The Standards report has informed the annual update of the approach to working with schools in Reading, as set out in the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness 2024/2025, appended to this report for consideration and approval by ACE Committee.

- 1.4. January 8th marked the first anniversary of the death of Ruth Perry, a beloved colleague, peer and friend to so many in our education community. School leaders continue to be supported individually and in groups as our community continues to come to terms with the loss of Ruth, and the Education Partnership Board is maintaining our collective prioritisation on school leader wellbeing. HM Coroner conducted an inquest into the death of Ruth which concluded on 7th of December 2023. The inquest recorded a narrative conclusion of suicide, contributed to by an Ofsted inspection carried out in November 2022. HM Coroner published a Prevention of future deaths report on 19 December, requesting Department for Education, Ofsted and Reading Borough Council to respond to identified matters of concern.
- 1.5. Work has been undertaken with schools on the actions being taken in response to the Coroner's findings, which align strongly with the work being undertaken with the Education Partnership Board, enhancing and developing current practice and enshrining this practice in the School Effectiveness Framework for Reading. The response of Reading Borough Council to the regulation 28 report and the School Effectiveness Framework for Reading are appended to this report.

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. The enclosed school standards report identifies the following key points.
- 3.2. 91.8% of schools in Reading are graded good or better, slightly above the average for the South-East. 97% of locally maintained schools are judged good or better by Ofsted. Only one locally maintained school judged as Requiring Improvement to be judged Good. This is significantly better than national and South-East averages.
- 3.3. In the early years, maintained nursery schools continue to provide exceptional provision for all children and those with disadvantage and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Recruitment and funding continue to be of significant concern for this group of schools and limit the potential for sector outreach improvement work.

- 3.4. Outcomes for children who need SEND support in primary are strong, compared to national benchmarks for the group, reflecting the impact of the work undertaken to improve inclusion in Early years and Primary phases.
- 3.5. At Key Stage 2, Local Authority results are below national averages for Reading Writing and Maths at the expected standard. In Primary, attainment outcomes in reading and maths are improving at a greater rate than in schools nationally and average progress in these areas is above national averages. Writing remains a significantly weak area in Primary phase outcomes. Though schools have ongoing development priorities to implement change, progress is slow and there is currently insufficient school-to school improvement capacity to ensure schools benefit from economies of scale in terms of curriculum design and resourcing. The Education Partnership Board are supporting work by clusters to address this area and the School Effectiveness team have increased the level of scrutiny on school improvement progress in underperforming schools.
- 3.6. Local Authority average outcomes are above national averages in Secondary Schools though there is significant variation between schools. Average Progress scores for the LA in Secondary have improved at a rate above that of other LAs nationally.
- 3.7. Outcomes for disadvantaged children with and without SEND are weak in all phases and continue to be of significant concern. Poor attendance significantly impacts outcomes for this group.
- 3.8. Children of Caribbean Heritage are significantly at risk of educational underperformance across phases but have a low profile with many school leaders, governing bodies and trusts. More work is needed across all schools to swiftly identify, understand, and remove barriers for this group, building on the anti-racist curriculum work programme in Reading schools.
- 3.9. Outcomes for children with SEND are less convincing at the end of KS4 suggesting there is more work to be done in terms of Secondary inclusion where children with SEND continue to be more vulnerable to underperformance, suspension, and exclusion than their peers.
- 3.10. Cohort complexity in terms of English as an Additional Language, children with SEND and in year mobility, impacts outcomes in all phases across Reading. In some schools, the proportions of children with vulnerabilities are well above national averages. There is a strong correlation between cohort complexity and underperformance. Cohort complexity impacts the workload and school improvement focus of senior leaders and it is difficult to recruit and retain high quality staff at all levels. This means the improvement trajectory in these schools can take time. Extra capacity in term of school improvement is often needed, but difficult to finance and source.
- 3.11. At Key Stage 4, Children without disadvantage or SEND perform above the national average in all performance measures, though as with other results there is variation at a school level.
- 3.12. **Roles and Responsibilities:** 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; 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
- 3.13. **National and Local Context:** School standards and attainment in Reading are impacted by national and local context.
- 3.14. **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 continues to be embedded and schools are continuing to be engaged and participating in our curriculum development projects. This will support school-to-school support as it develops.
- 3.15. **Significant developmental delays in early years** – including language and communication, emotional regulation, and socialisation. A good start is more vital than ever. 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 continue to 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 are in their second year as a national school-to-school support "Stronger Practice Hub" for early years which is providing opportunities for support both to maintained schools and Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector early years providers. 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 continues to demonstrate a strong impact where schools are engaging in the offered programmes.
- 3.16. **School resilience and school leader's wellbeing.** Heads across all sectors tell us nationally and locally 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 continues to be significant local appetite from Reading school leaders to develop our Reading-wide approach to workforce and to wellbeing. School leaders continue to report high levels of staff absence and difficulty recruiting. These issues are compounding the challenges post-pandemic and continue to test the resilience of schools. Effective local recruitment, training and retention of school staff

continue to be a priority to secure school resilience and positive recovery of outcomes for children.

- 3.17. **Pupil behaviour** has been more challenging nationally and locally. 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, impacting on outcomes. Progress has been made by working with schools to commission new Alternative Provision (AP) and improve existing AP; but this remains an area of high priority as school leaders continue to identify the availability, affordability, and quality of Alternative Provision as a contributing factor to poorer outcomes, alongside the need to recruit and retain staff and secure community confidence in behaviour and safety.
- 3.18. **The national system for children with SEND** continues to experience 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 challenging nationally, further impacting equity for children with additional need. Reading has been successful in securing additional investment from the Department of Education, which has funded the launch in January 2024 of the new Reading Inclusion Support in Education (RISE) service. The RISE service supports all Reading schools to improve their offer of Ordinarily Available Provision, Graduated Response and better support all children and young people, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The service supports schools by offering free training and coaching, audits, supervision and networks, and boasts specialists and consultants, including a senior educational psychologist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist. Reading has also been successful in expanding the number of specialist places for children with SEND, but still face significant challenges in securing sufficient specialist local places, this is set out in more detail in the accompanying report being considered by ACE Committee at this meeting, regarding SEND Place Planning.
- 3.19. **Cost of living.** Reading Education Partnership Board, working with Reading Secondary Schools and College Leaders and Reading Primary Heads' Association has supported local research regarding the contribution of local schools during the cost-of-living crisis. Differences in local challenge facing schools – social, economic, familial security, aspirational and the rest - remains an unequal burden on school communities. Impacts on children's regulation and poorer mental health are consistent concerns of school leaders, as well as impacts on children's resilience. The research has identified a wide range of ways in which schools have responded to support families, going beyond their traditional remit, and also reducing costs of enrichment activity to maintain inclusion; brokering of second-hand uniform; information and guidance to parents and carers; feeding families; maintaining contact with families outside of school and use of Free School Meals and Pupil Premium funding.
- 3.20. The Annual School Standards report 2022-2023 confirms the priorities to improve school standards and attainment for 2022-2025, which are reflected within the Education Partnership Board priorities and 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 undertaken in the six months since the last update to ACE Committee is set out below.
- 3.21. The School Effectiveness team leads on the work with schools to deliver improved outcomes and standards. The team undertook and recorded eighty official visits to Locally Maintained schools in term one including effectiveness, safeguarding, English monitoring and curriculum reviews. The team also completed Head Teacher Performance Management for thirty schools and provided training for headteachers, subject leads, individual school staff teams, behaviour leads, safeguarding leads, School Business Managers and Governors.

- 3.22. Reading Borough Council has high ambition to provide opportunity for all of our children and young people to thrive in education and succeed. It is proposed that the current strategic approach to supporting improved educational outcomes and school effectiveness is further developed and captured in a Borough-wide Education Strategy, capturing the wider work we do with business, community and cultural organisations to improve educational outcomes for Reading children, to be brought forward for consideration at the next ACE Committee. This will include further learning from the independent learning review currently underway.

4. Priorities, actions and next steps

- 4.1. A more strategic and cohesive approach to collective action to improve outcomes for children has developed over the past year, building on the report presented to ACE Committee in July 2023. Education Partnership Board have endorsed the following priorities:
- Developing school-to school support and challenge through the Education Partnership Board.
 - Promotion of positive wellbeing for school leaders and school staff.
 - 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.
 - Building governor capacity, skills and oversight to enhance support and challenge.
 - Implementing a Borough-wide teaching staff recruitment and retention strategy.
- 4.2. Actions to deliver these priority areas is being coordinated and progressed through the Education Partnership Board. Progress and next steps are summarised by priority area below.
- 4.3. Priority 1: Developing school-to school support and challenge through the Education Partnership Board**
- 4.4. The vision for the Education Partnership Board has now been agreed and work has begun on mapping and reorganizing cluster level school to school support. Roles and responsibilities of the Board, LA and Cluster have also been agreed.
- 4.5. More cluster work has been undertaken since the beginning of the new academic year, with every local school now engaged in a cluster. Clusters are developing their local shared action plans based on school and Education Partnership Board vision and priorities. Clusters and phase association sessions are increasingly well attended. School to school support has been secured for all Rapid Improvement Groups (as set out in the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness), and this support has been effective as demonstrated in all community school Ofsted judgements since the last standards report to ACE Committee.
- 4.6. Leadership capacity in schools needs to be supported and enhanced to deliver the improved outcomes we wish to see. Reading does not benefit from the national teaching school network, 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. The proposed Education Strategy will consider options for further building school improvement capacity locally.
- 4.7. 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, overseen by the Education Partnership Board. Developing school to school support networks and a local infrastructure of school support will be key areas of work over the coming academic years.

- 4.8. 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 local school community clusters and is chaired by the Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children. The remit of the 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.
- 4.9. 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
- 4.10. Progress has been made to coordinate Borough – wide actions to reduce educational inequality, as reflected in the Reading Borough Council Tackling Inequality Strategy, and through the Reading Borough Council Place Based Pilots programme. This will be a key area of focus over the next three years.
- 4.11. The Education Partnership Board is leading further development of school community clusters and a model of Reading Leaders of education to enhance school to school support capacity. However further work will be needed over the coming years to secure the necessary level of school-to-school support to improve outcomes in line with our ambitions.
- 4.12. Priority 2: Promotion of positive wellbeing for school leaders and school staff**
- 4.13. The first annual Headteacher wellbeing survey was completed in 2023. Feedback from Head Teacher's Performance Management reviews and the results of the 2023 wellbeing survey have informed discussions on wellbeing priorities with Education Partnership Board, and school leaders through the Director of Education's termly meeting with Headteachers. Three priorities have been identified for 2024/2025 to improve school leader wellbeing:
- Development of coaching and mentoring support for school leaders;
 - Support in addressing community and parental behaviours, and the establishment of Parent Carer and Community Acceptable Behaviour Policy Protection for all staff in educational settings (including social media).

- Support regarding the Ofsted inspection process.
- 4.14. The school leader wellbeing survey has informed the development of an enhanced Reading Wellbeing offer for schools and school leaders as well as clear expectations regarding parent and community behaviour and a coaching and mentoring support entitlement for school leaders. These entitlements and expectations are set out in the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness appended to this report.
 - 4.15. The second annual wellbeing survey will be undertaken after the Easter 2024 break and will be widened to all school staff, to give a picture regarding the wellbeing for all school staff, to track progress and to help inform further actions for the Education Partnership Board and Brighter Futures for Children.
 - 4.16. **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.**
 - 4.17. The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness sets out how BfC 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.
 - 4.18. The approach to working with schools is also set out in the Framework. 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.
 - 4.19. 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
 - 4.20. 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.

- 4.21. 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 year two of a two-year project with national leader Tom Sherington to implement instructional coaching in their schools.
- 4.22. 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.
- 4.23. 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 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.
- 4.24. 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.
- 4.25. 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.
- 4.26. Positive impact of this focus has been evidenced in behaviour and personal development being identified as a strength at most school inspections.
- 4.27. 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 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, but more work needs to be done to ensure all schools are engaging and acting to improve outcomes for groups of pupils with poor outcomes, notably children of Caribbean Heritage. 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.

4.28. 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. An enhanced response for Year 5, 6 and Year 7 pupils was delivered in summer 2023, centred on subsidised summer-based activities. Outcomes data informed this targeted approach and programme has enabled tracking of progress for vulnerable groups of pupils through the autumn term.

4.29. Priority 4: Building governor capacity, skills and oversight to enhance support and challenge

4.30. 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.

4.31. 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.

4.32. Recruitment and retention in Governance in locally Maintained schools is declining and the governor time commitment and skill level needed in complex schools is a significant barrier to improvement. Further investment will be needed in governor recruitment and retention in the coming year, and will be a key feature of the proposed Education Strategy.

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

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

4.35. The Education Partnership Board is facilitating a strategic focus on priorities for recruitment of school staff. Agreed 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 hard to fill roles such as School Business Managers, school leaders, SENDCOs and SEND more specialist staff with knowledge and skills of SEND are also being considered.

4.36. Progress has been made through a Brighter Futures for Children – Reading Borough Council task and finish group in developing a Borough-wide approach for school business professionals to address recruitment challenges. A task and finish group has

also been established to coordinate overseas recruitment campaigns for specialist posts, working with Reading University.

- 4.37. In terms of next steps, the local cost of living research has identified opportunities to promote more employment opportunities and pathways into school careers for local people, by building an adult learning programme in partnership with local schools and Reading University. This will be a key priority for the next three years.

5. Contribution to strategic aims

- 5.1. 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”
- 5.2. 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.

6. Environmental and climate implications

- 6.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2. 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.

7. Community engagement

- 7.1. 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.

8. Equality impact assessment

- 8.1. 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.
- 8.2. 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).

9. Other relevant considerations

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

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. 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.

- 10.2. 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).

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. 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.

12. Timetable for implementation

- 12.1. This report sets out actions being taken in the 2023/2024. A future Education Strategy report will set out multi-year actions between 2024 and 2026.

13. Background papers

There are none

Appendices

- 1. School Standards and Achievement Annual Report 2022/2023**
- 2. Reading Borough Council Response to Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths 12.12.24**
- 3. Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness 2024-2025**

