

Cabinet

9 May 2024

Educational Attainment Working Group Report

Recommendation

That Cabinet considers the content of the report and endorses the recommendations of the Educational Attainment Working Group.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A motion was formally passed at the July 2022 Full Council meeting for a Working Group to be established to investigate the disparity in educational attainment rates that exist within Warwickshire. There are clear discrepancies in attainment rates based on a number of factors, such as levels of deprivation based on geography, and whether or not a child comes from a disadvantaged background. The Working Group was set up to examine the causes of disparity and make suggestions on the initial stages of an action plan to reduce these disparities.
- 1.2 The group met on a total of seven occasions, with members also meeting with colleagues from the education team at Leicestershire County Council and making focused visits to nine schools in Warwickshire. These schools were chosen as they had been identified as making a positive difference in attainment rates, and in some cases had managed to narrow the existing gaps in attainment between their disadvantaged pupils and the national non-disadvantage group. They were a mixture of primary and secondary schools and academies. Leicestershire County Council was chosen as it was a statistical neighbour to Warwickshire, sharing similar attainment rates, areas of social deprivation and demographics.
- 1.3 Through their discussions, members gained a clearer picture of the different education strategies that were already in place and some that are in the pipeline to be implemented and how these all sought to combine to help reduce the differences in attainment rates across Warwickshire.
- 1.4 A full summary of the data that was analysed and the discussions that took place is included in the Working Group's report, which is included at Appendix A. This report also sets out some key recommendations that were proposed by the Working Group as the initial steps of an action plan, with a further, longer-term recommendation also being proposed.
- 1.5 The recommendations are set out below, with a full explanation for the rationale behind them being included in the main report.

Recommendation 1 – Lobbying for legislative change

That the Working Group endorses lobbying of government to amend legislation, to enable all eligible pupils to be automatically enrolled onto a scheme that allows them to receive free school meals.

The percentage of children in receipt of free school meals is used as a statistical indicator of attainment and achievement, with such children being classified as disadvantaged. From an early stage members of the Working Group had recommended an automatic enrolment scheme for eligible pupils to receive free school meals be implemented, as this would help schools to receive additional funding. Research showed however there were potential legal implications associated with GDPR and data protection. The Working Group has proposed to consider funding an alternative means of addressing this, and they have proposed lobbying of central government to encourage enactment of legislative change.

Recommendation 2 – Enhanced scrutiny of education strategies

That the Working Group endorses the establishment of a sub-committee of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which would be updated on the ongoing implementation of the education strategies.

A number of new strategies are due to be implemented, while some that already exist require review. Working Group members felt the review of new strategies was an important piece of work that needed ongoing monitoring, but it would be too onerous for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to do as many strategies were to become embedded in a relatively short period of time. Members felt it would be more appropriate for a sub-committee to be set up so more in-depth analysis and discussions could take place on the direction of travel of the new and revised strategies. It was proposed that an annual update would be provided to the Committee, along with briefing notes as and when appropriate.

Recommendation 3 – Enhanced promotion of opportunities for pupils

That the Working Group endorses improved promotion of opportunities for children, such as registering to sit the 11 plus and additional support available to pupil premium children.

Feedback showed there was often a lack of knowledge over additional support and opportunities available to children. This included some school headteachers apparently not being aware of reduced qualifying score for the 11 plus exam at grammar schools for pupil premium children. Although there was some promotion of this, members felt this needed to be improved.

Recommendation 4 - Continued progress of the Warwickshire Education Partnership Board

That the Working Group endorses the refreshed Warwickshire Education Partnership Board. (WEPB)

Members initially expressed a view that schools could do more to collaborate and share examples of good practice or strategy. However as time has progressed the situation has noticeably improved. The former Education Challenge Board has been refreshed and renamed the Warwickshire Education Partnership Board, due to the negative connotations associated with the word ‘challenge’ and a renewed focus and ethos on partnerships. It now meets monthly as opposed to quarterly. The board is well attended and has representatives from early years to colleges, and represents the 250 schools in the county. Members noted this had improved communication between schools and the LA. It was also noted the Board was focused on discussing strategic issues that affect all stakeholders across the county. Members look forward to the continuation and progress of this Board.

A longer-term ambition is to improve mental health provision for children, as early interventions could improve attainment levels and mean there could be less pressures on services later in life. However, a full costing for this would need to take place.

2. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from the report.

3. Environmental Implications

None.

4. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 4.1 It is proposed the recommendations are implemented with immediate effect. A review of the strategies associated with educational attainment would be considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months’ time.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 – Working Group report

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Other members: Councillors Brett Beetham, Jo Barker, Margaret Bell, Barbara Brown, Jonathan Chilvers, Marian Humphreys, Jan Matecki, Ian Shenton and Jerry Roodhouse