

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

3

PREVENTING SCHOOL FAILURE

Report of the Director of Children, Schools & Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

To seek Cabinet approval for the new approach to supporting school self-improvement and the prevention of school failure.

2. Summary

2.1 The County Council has a good track record for supporting rapid improvement in schools in Ofsted categories, but further work is needed to prevent some schools from falling into a category at the time of inspection. This report outlines issues identified through a review of school weaknesses and the outcomes of the Best Value review. It also details actions that have already been taken and proposals for further service improvement.

2.2 Action has been taken to accelerate the progress of schools in Ofsted categories and also to identify schools that may be at risk in order to provide the support and challenge that will lead them to become self-improving. This has required radical changes in the work programme in order to be fully effective in supporting rapid improvement and also in ensuring the identification of risks at the earliest possible stage.

3. Conclusion

The approach outlined in this report was discussed by the Achievement Panel on 4 July 2002. Cabinet is invited to approve the recommendation of the Panel that the approach be implemented.

1 Background

- 1.1 Hertfordshire's record of special measures schools over time compares favourably with that of its statistical neighbours (from 1993-2001 the percentage of schools in special measures in Hertfordshire was 3.3, the median of our statistical neighbours was 4.3 and the national figure was 4.4). Over the last year however, there has been a declining trend. There are currently fifteen schools designated as having serious weaknesses (13 primary, 1 secondary and 1 ESC). This represents 2.7% of Hertfordshire schools currently with the percentage over time being 4.8% compared to 5.8% nationally. Six Hertfordshire schools are currently deemed to be underachieving. There is no comparative data available for this category.
- 1.2 Hertfordshire provides its schools with regular support in line with the Code of Practice and indicated by their position in the 9 cell matrix. There are 342 schools (62%) judged to be self improving (cells 1, 2 and 3), 140 schools (25.5%) judged to need some support to become self improving (cells 4, 5 and 6) and 67 schools (12.2%), including those in Ofsted categories, causing concern (cells 7, 8 and 9). There is a regular monitoring programme for all schools and particular additional support for those in cells 7, 8 and 9.
- 1.3 Ofsted inspections focus particularly on attainment levels and the quality of teaching and learning and leadership and management. Particular vulnerabilities are:
- Low attainment (usually indicated by comparative PANDA grades of D or E, or downward trends over time);
 - A weak teaching profile where more than one in ten lessons is unsatisfactory and/or there is insufficient good teaching (the national picture now shows averages of 95% for satisfactory or better teaching and 75% for good or better);
 - Weakness in leadership and management, particularly of the headteacher (these schools often have weak procedures for school self-evaluation and limited capacity for recognising and responding quickly to change or identified weaknesses).
- Schools, particularly small ones and those in the most challenging circumstances, can be very fragile and situations can change rapidly. The current recruitment and retention difficulties have brought this to a head in many schools, as the quality of teaching is a critical indicator.
- 1.4 Overall the picture in Hertfordshire is positive in terms of performance; Hertfordshire's attainment levels are above the national average. The LEA statistical profile indicates that 71.9% teaching is good or better (94.2% satisfactory or better) and that 72.6% are well led (90.3% satisfactory or better). Our own data shows that 85% of schools have secure self evaluation process in place.
- 1.5 The Best Value review of SIAS identified the need for a more preventative approach to school capacity building and also a need to know our schools better. Early alerts of difficulties in schools are a critical trigger for intervention. LEA officers and advisers

communicate concerns through the regular schools causing concern meetings and through informal communications but currently the collection of data is not fully integrated. For this reason, and in line with the outcomes of the Best Value Review, an integrated electronic database is being developed to capture data from across the service and allow easy access. This database will include attainment data and a single file for each Hertfordshire school.

- 1.6 When schools are in Ofsted categories or causing serious concern to the LEA, they require a high level of support (between 5 and 30 days per annum) from officers and advisers in order to promote development, monitor progress and accelerate improvement. This can result in too little time and attention being available to support and challenge other schools which may need help to improve in line with the stated policy in the Hertfordshire Code of Practice. For this reason, and in line with the recommendations of the Best Value review, an intervention team is being formed to undertake this intensive support leaving other school development advisers (SDAs) to focus on the regular visiting programme and new preventative measures.

2 Recent developments and issues

- 2.1 The Intervention Team will comprise a team leader, four primary and two secondary school development advisers. They will work exclusively in Ofsted category schools and other schools causing serious concern, to support accelerated improvement programmes and enable early removal from categories. This will mean a workload, for each member of the team, of between five and eight schools with visits on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Primary appointments have been made but after two recruitment drives we have not yet been successful in making any secondary appointments. Further recruitment is underway for January 2003.
- 2.2 Work with schools causing concern will also be strengthened by additional SDA time focused upon other schools which may be at risk, in line with the Hertfordshire Code of Practice. The work of the Intervention Team will be strengthened through the use of other advisory staff including Literacy, Numeracy and Key Stage 3 Consultants and also through the teacher consultant programme which will provide intensive coaching for inexperienced and overseas teachers. The Intervention Team SDA will co-ordinate the support programme for each school through a Core Project Group.
- 2.3 A programme of weekly interventions conducted by the SDA has been put in place to support high risk schools where an inspection is imminent. Particular attention has been given to coaching to improve leadership and teaching. There has also been training to improve the presentation of the school's self evaluation profile (inspection form S4). Since the start of this programme fifteen high risk schools have had successful inspections and four schools have been cleared by inspection of serious weaknesses.
- 2.4 A new pattern of meetings is in place to focus upon schools causing concern:

- Weekly meetings between the Assistant Director, School Standards & Curriculum and the Principal and Senior Advisers, School Development;
 - Regular meetings between quadrant staff, SDAs and other key staff to discuss the progress of schools causing concern, chaired by the Principal Adviser;
 - Regular meetings of the Schools Causing Concern Strategy Group to monitor and develop policy and practice, chaired by the Assistant Director;
 - Regular school reviews with all SDAs with more regular reviews for high risk schools with the Principal or Senior Adviser, School Development;
- 2.5 A training programme for SDAs has been put in place to increase their skills in effective intervention and learn from best practice. This programme focuses particularly on the key outcomes for schools and includes modules on data analysis, teaching and learning, leadership and management and Ofsted criteria. Currently five SDAs are Ofsted Registered Inspectors, nine are trained team inspectors (including RgIs) and eight are undergoing training. Training for the remainder of the team is planned for 2002/2003 (Ofsted suspended its training programme for two years causing a waiting list)
- 2.6 Targeted support is being provided for high risk schools for staff recruitment and retention. This involves additional adviser and officer time to support recruitment processes.
- 2.7 As part of the preventative strategy a programme of mid-inspection cycle reviews will be provided for schools, on a traded basis. These reviews will support headteachers and governors in drawing up an improvement plan relevant to their stage of development. Where weaknesses are identified, training, coaching and monitoring will be provided. This should ensure that these schools become self improving and have successful inspections.
- 2.8 As well as serving teachers a number of serving headteachers have been recruited to support both intervention and prevention programmes. In addition programmes making use of Beacon Schools and Advanced Skills Teachers are being aligned with the Diversity Pathfinder programme.
- 2.9 A review of the visiting programme is being undertaken in partnership with schools, in order to meet their needs more closely by greater differentiation. This will be in line with the Code of Practice principle of Intervention in Inverse Proportion to Success. This review focuses on appropriate challenge for the most successful schools and is intended to increase the effectiveness of intervention with these schools, reduce the level of school contact time and create more time to work with schools causing concern and to learn from the Best Practice in Hertfordshire schools.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the following proposals approved by the Achievement Panel on 4 July 2002:

- to maintain the Intervention Team for up to three years until all schools are cleared from Ofsted categories and the visits programme has resulted in a shift to a significantly higher proportion of Hertfordshire schools judged to be ‘self-improving’;
- to implement fully the mid-inspection cycle review programme in the next academic year incorporating the support of serving headteachers, and to evaluate its effectiveness in the autumn term 2003 (at the time the third inspection cycle commences);
- to continue with the high risk programme for schools with inspections prior to the start of the new inspection cycle supported by serving headteachers and teachers to act as teaching and learning and leadership and management coaches;
- to support the adjustment of the school visiting programme to differentiate more closely for the needs of schools, particularly those which are already deemed to be self-improving;
- in line with the identified activity in the 2002/2003 Strategic Plan to strengthen further the role of governors in schools causing concern and also their skills in recruiting and retaining high quality headteachers

4 Financial Implications

The programme will be funded from the redistribution of existing resources.

Background information referred to by the author whilst compiling this report

- HMCI Annual Report 2000-2001
- School inspection report
- Ofsted LEA Statistical Profile
- Research with other LEAs on improvement strategies with schools causing concern
- British Educational Journal

If you would like to know more about the issues referred to in this report please contact Gill Jones, Tel: 01582 830360