

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH 2004 at 10.00A.M.**

**Agenda Item No.**

**5**

**REPORT OF THE MONITORING OF SCHOOLS TOPIC GROUP**

*Report of the Director, Children, Schools and Families*

Author: Gill Jones, Interim Assistant Director,  
School Standards and Curriculum  
Telephone: 01582 830364

Members of the Topic Group: Ian Simpson [Chairman]  
Tony Dodd  
Derek Hills  
Moyra O'Neill  
Seamus Quilty  
David Billing  
Maureen Thompson (Parent representative)

Executive member: Robert Gordon, Education

**1. Purpose of report**

To provide the Scrutiny Committee with a report on the findings of the Monitoring of Schools Topic Group.

**2. Summary**

2.1 The group has met three times and considered:

- the case histories of two ex-special measures schools
- information from expert witnesses from these schools
- a briefing by the Director on the review of the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern.

2.2 The members were clear that prevention and early intervention were the 'keys' in this area of work. A number of actions and issues relating

to improved effectiveness have been identified to be taken into account during the review process.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Group considered that the programme of work had provided insight into work with schools causing concern and had provided sufficient opportunity to contribute to the review programme without the need for a further meeting.

#### **4. Background**

The CSF Scrutiny Committee have expressed concern over time about:

- the number of schools going into Ofsted categories
- the time that it takes some schools to be restored to 'good health'
- the effectiveness of the measures taken by CSF to prevent schools 'at risk' being identified for intervention by Ofsted.

#### **5. The Work of the Topic Group**

5.1 The Topic Group met on three occasions:

- 1) to consider the case studies of two schools that had been cleared of Special Measures, one primary and one secondary
- 2) to receive information from expert witnesses from the two schools:
  - Chairs of Governors (2)
  - Vice-Chair of Governors
  - Acting Head
  - Teacher Consultant
- 3) to be briefed by the Director on the planned review of the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern.

5.2 The key issues evident from the programme were the critical importance of school leadership and of preventative work followed by early identification of concerns and speedy intervention.

5.3 A range of further issues and actions were identified related to improving the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern:

- the importance of the reliability of the new MCSI framework to replace the 9-cell matrix
- the critical role of the headteacher in providing leadership to improve the school
- the particular issues that may relate to changes in leadership and long-serving headteachers
- the importance of identifying and dealing with ineffective leadership quickly
- the importance of all governors receiving adequate performance data, including data comparing their school with others

- the need to include in the regular training programme for governors:
  - the role of the governing body in monitoring the work of the school
  - how governors can identify and respond to concerns at an early stage
- the paramount importance of the quality of teaching and learning and the use of teacher consultants, ASTs and strategy consultants to improve this
- the critical nature of recruitment and retention
- the urgency for the early alerts database (SPEARs) to be put into action
- the need to improve 'intelligence' about schools in the Quadrants and across CSF more generally, and to make greater use of 'soft indicators'
- the need, when staff are seconded to a school causing concern, to make good use of 'a fresh pair of eyes' to gain a new perspective on what needs to be done to bring about improvement
- the greater vulnerability of schools inspected early in the autumn term where there are a number of staff changes and the need to support these schools.

Members would like these issues to be taken into account as part of the review.

## **6. Support**

Members also considered the support needs of schools and the following were proposed:

- additional support for schools with staff shortages
- a trained group of teachers to be seconded (full or part-time) to schools with staffing difficulties
- greater use of additional governors
- targeted training for governors in schools where the training database indicates that few governors have recently undertaken training
- the creation of networks of schools to support each other through difficulties
- the extension of good practice visits between schools to improve practice and create co-operative arrangements.

## **7. Next Steps**

The Topic Group are aware of the need to allow time for the impact of the planned review of the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, schools causing concern. It is proposed, therefore, that the Scrutiny Committee receive a report in the autumn of 2005 so that members can assess whether further action is required.

## **8. Access to Service Implications**

None arising from this report.

## **9. Financial Implications**

The financial implications of this report are already included in the CSF plan and the 'Growth and Change' programme.

### **Background information used by the author in compiling this report.**

- *Ofsted Form 4 Performance Indicators*
- *Reports and minutes of the Monitoring of Schools Topic Group*
- *Schools Causing Concern records and data base*
- *HMCI Report Feb 2004*

If you would like to know more about the issues referred to in this report please contact: Gill Jones, Telephone: 01582 830357