



Report to School Organisation Committee

AGENDA ITEM 9

Title: OfSTED Feedback

Date: 21 July 2004

Author: Nick Powley, Head of Policy Planning and Performance (Schools)

Contact Officer: Nick Powley (01296 383527)

Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny

1. Background

Buckinghamshire County Council in its role as the LEA was inspected at the start of February 2004.

2. Main Findings

The Inspection Team made judgements about 47 areas of activity. In the vast majority of these areas of activity, the judgements made were satisfactory or better, and within that, the majority was highly satisfactory or better.

In addition, the Team made three overall judgements, and these were:

- i) progress since the previous inspection (2000) is deemed to be satisfactory;
- ii) overall effectiveness of the authority is deemed to be satisfactory; and
- iii) capacity for further development is deemed to be highly satisfactory.

The report also set out the main strengths and weaknesses:

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and clarity of corporate plans • Monitoring, review and scrutiny processes, including performance management • Schools' confidence in the strategic manager for schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a fundamental review of school funding arrangements • Poor oversight of the delegated schools' budget • Ineffective consultation and communication, resulting in some schools' limited understanding of, and commitment to, the portfolio structure • Lack of clarity in cross-portfolio responsibilities of strategic managers
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and well set-out plans • Monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the provision of performance data • Intervention in underperforming schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools' lack of understanding of, and unwillingness to accept, their roles and responsibilities in relation to the <i>Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations</i>
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for all national strategies in the curriculum • Support for school governors • Guidance on self-evaluation for schools and governors • Support for gifted and talented pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of schools' capacity to act as informed purchasers of services • Budget-setting support for schools where management is weak
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of the council to make rapid progress in further developing the SEN strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity about the LEA's direction in supporting pupils with SEN • Lack of transparency in SEN funding arrangements • Ineffective strategic leadership leading to a lack of confidence by schools
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work of pupil referral units (PRUs) in promoting and supporting the LEA's strategies for behaviour and for pupils educated other than at school • Provision for looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic leadership • Securing provision of full-time education for Key Stage 3 pupils out of school

The Council has welcomed the external scrutiny provided by the OFSTED inspection process. The Authority has been able to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses

identified within the report and re-focus the available resources to support further improvement.

Providing School Places

The planning of school places in Buckinghamshire was described as being highly satisfactory. In addition, the bringing together of the school places, admissions and asset management planning teams was considered to be effective in improving joint working.

The LEA was described as having a clear strategy to increase secondary places to deal with the projected increase in numbers by 2006. The building programme was described as focusing 'appropriately on improving specialist accommodation together with the use of temporary classrooms to allow for the downturn in numbers expected after 2006'.

In respect of the primary sector, the LEA was described as having 'made good use of amalgamations and age-range changes to reduce places and the number of very small schools'.

Next Steps

An Action Plan has been drawn up which will be considered by addresses the recommendations from the inspection and sets out the priorities for school improvement. It is envisaged that the Action Plan will provide an effective framework within which schools in Buckinghamshire will continue to develop.

Within the Authority the drive for school improvement continues, through strengthening local partnership arrangements, for example through the School Organisation Committee.

The Action Plan will be considered by the Cabinet on 26th July and will then be sent to Ofsted.