



The Buckinghamshire
Education Strategy
2022 – 2027





Foreword

A strategy for education and skills was developed for Buckinghamshire in 2018 as a result of collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders. It was designed to act as a compass for implementing continuous improvement in educational provision in Buckinghamshire until 2022. Following further collaboration and engagement with wide range of partners, the strategy has been refreshed to show the progress made and to highlight the priority areas we need to focus on in the future.

The review of the strategy is timely given that we have been and are still working through an unprecedented period of uncertainty and change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent events have had a significant impact on the education of our children and young people, and now is the time to review and reformulate our ambitions for education in a post-pandemic world.

Since the launch of the Education and Skills Strategy, much has been achieved and improved upon, but there is much more that we need to do, together with our partners to secure the very best outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire. This strategy sets out the roadmap of how this can be achieved so that collectively, we can work together to secure a better future for all of our children and young people in Buckinghamshire.



Introduction

Local context

In Buckinghamshire there are 126,804 children and young people under the age of 18, representing 23% of the county's total population (2020 Mid-year Population Estimate).

There are 236 state schools and academies in Buckinghamshire attended by 88,304 children and young people (January 2022), along with 328 Early Years settings. As a county Buckinghamshire has a strong mix of education provision which offers variety and choice; we are currently one of only a handful of counties in the country to have an almost fully selective secondary system with a mix of grammar and non-selective secondary schools, along with a wide range of early years providers, infant schools, junior schools and combined schools, free schools, all age through schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), special schools, schools with Additional Resourced Provision (ARPs), a Further Education college and other post 16 providers. The distribution of schools within the county can be seen in Figure 1.

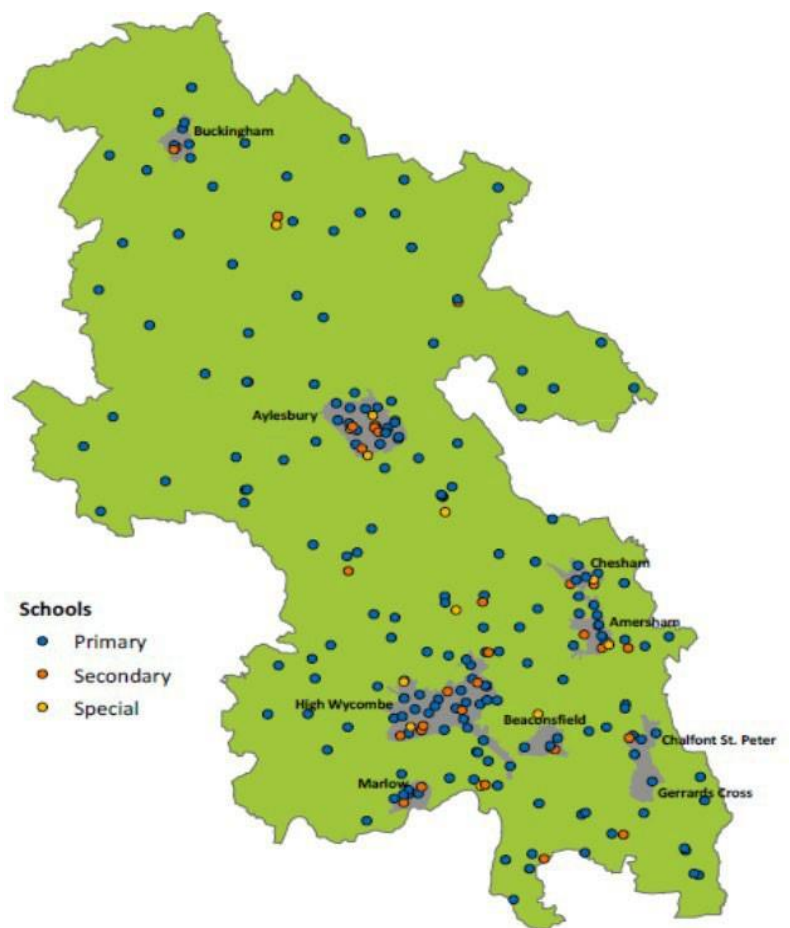


Figure 1: Distribution of school types in Buckinghamshire

In December 2022, 89% of secondary schools, 20% of special schools, 50% of all age through schools, 33% of Pupil Referral Units and 26% of primary schools in Buckinghamshire are either academies or free schools, bringing the total percentage of academies in Buckinghamshire to approximately 35% of all schools. There are strong established relationships with our schools, academies and early years settings.

Buckinghamshire has good schools which provide a good education for our children and young people. The percentage of pupils in Buckinghamshire schools rated as Ofsted good or outstanding has increased from 82% in 2015 to 90.6% in November 2022. This is nearly three percentage points above national standards (87.8% end of November 2022). The percentage of active early years registered providers in Buckinghamshire rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding has increased from 88% in 2015 to 97.5% in August 2022. This is above both national (96.3%) and regional (96.8%) averages.

Our vision for education in Buckinghamshire for the next five years

Education is fundamental to improving life chances and can transform the lives of children and young people. It should provide an exciting journey of self-discovery and fulfilment that sets our children and young people up for a lifetime of learning, ambition, and achievement, made possible through an inclusive learning environment that is characterised by excellent teaching within a system that celebrates diversity.

Children and young people are at the heart of our Education Strategy as well as that of Buckinghamshire's Children and Young People's Partnership Plan and the Council's Children's Services priorities:

Children and Young People's Plan priorities:

- Keep children and young people safe and in their families wherever possible.
- Enable and support children, young people, parents and carers to overcome the challenges they may face.
- Improve children and young people's health and wellbeing.
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to realise their full potential.

Children's Services priorities for 2022/23:

Children's Social Care:

- Service improvement.
- Responding to the growing and unpredictable demand as a result of COVID-19.
- Recruitment and retention of social care workforce.
- Recruitment of in-house foster carers.

Education:

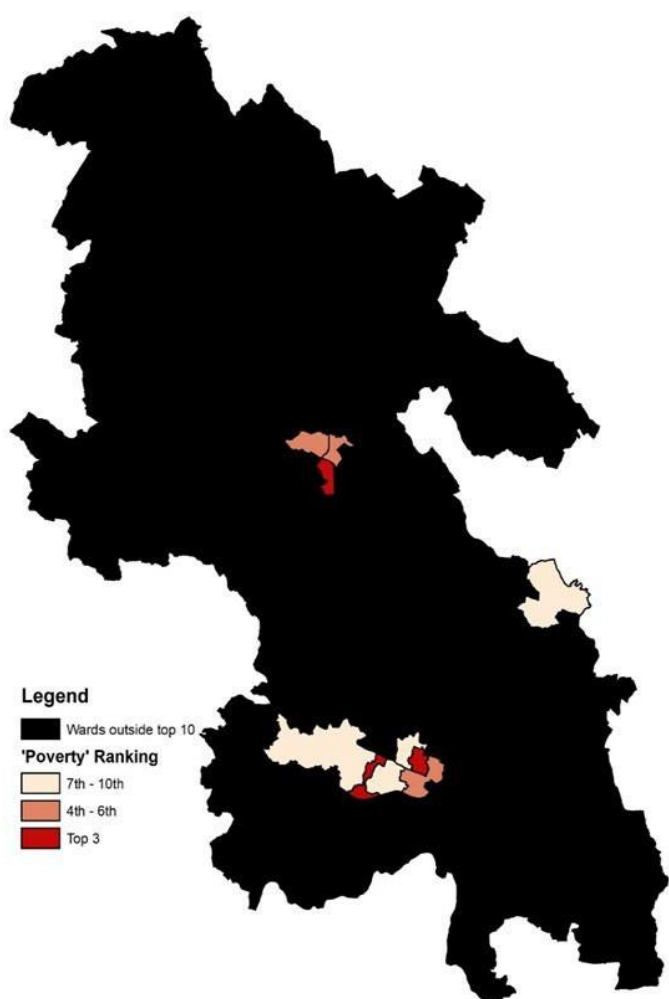
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) delivery and improvements.
- Improving education provision and educational outcomes.
- Work with schools to ensure that young people have access to good mental health support.
- Early help.

The vision of this strategy is to build a better future for all children and young people in Buckinghamshire so they can realise their potential whatever their starting point, with the focus on addressing the differential of experience between the vulnerable children in Buckinghamshire and their peers.

Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All

Buckinghamshire is widely known as an affluent county with great outcomes. However, this overall picture masks significant variations in outcomes, with some areas experiencing significant hardship. In July 2022, Buckinghamshire partners agreed a local vision for levelling up in the county, supported by a shared commitment to focus our collective resources on tackling priorities that will make a tangible difference to the outcomes of residents. By breaking the cycle of disadvantage, the ambition is to improve health outcomes and grow the local economy. ‘Opportunity Bucks - Succeeding for All’ is a partnership strategy which will focus on delivering initiatives and strategies to improve living standards and opportunity across the county. The initial focus of the programme is those ten wards identified in Figure 2 below which experience the poorest outcomes in terms of educational attainment, skill levels, income and health.

A key theme of the Opportunity Bucks programme is Education and Skills, ensuring that everyone in Buckinghamshire has the opportunity of achieving a good standard of attainment and skills. Through continually working towards improving outcomes for children and young people, ensuring they have the best start and work towards achieving their potential and working with educational professionals to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers through key initiatives such as the Buckinghamshire Challenge project, the Education Strategy will significantly contribute to realising the key priorities of the Opportunity Bucks strategy.



Electoral Ward	Ranking Score
Booker, Cressex and Castlefield	294
Totteridge and Bowerdean	282
Aylesbury South-West	276
Aylesbury North-West	273
Ryemead and Micklefield	268
Aylesbury North	260
Abbey	258
Terriers and Amersham Hill	250
West Wycombe	246
Chesham	236

Top 10 ranked electoral wards – multiple poverty

Figure 2: Location of top 10 electoral wards indicating multiple indicators of poverty

The Strategy will sit alongside other key strategies that support our broader ambitions for children and young people in Buckinghamshire as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Re-positioning the Strategy

The Strategy will also reinforce the ambitions set out in the Government's recently published Green paper on SEND and Alternative Education. A specific reference to the Green Paper can be found with reference to the Strategy's focus on Inclusion (Priority 4).



Principles of the Education Strategy

The Education Strategy is founded on four fundamental guiding principles:

- **Collaboration:** an ethos of collaboration and mutual respect between educational partners and a collective responsibility for the achievement of all children and young people, regardless of where they are educated or the status of establishment; this will also include co-production with families in order to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- **Proactivity and prevention:** the need to anticipate issues early and develop the strengths and resources needed to proactively improve outcomes for children and young people, rather than relying on reactive and often expensive intervention.
- **Inclusivity:** the ambition to have an education system where every children and young person is enabled to fulfil their potential regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, race or need.
- **Financial sustainability:** the necessity to provide support structures that are financially sustainable over the course of the strategy and beyond, increasing resilience and utilising excellence and expertise within the system.



Achievements since 2018

Much in the educational landscape has changed since 2018 when the original strategy was published, particularly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures, nationwide lockdowns, changes to the examination systems and the adoption of new ways of working have had a significant effect on the education of children and young people, and those who educate them.

The Education Standards Report 2020-21 for Buckinghamshire provides a detailed summary of educational progress, the most notable being:

- Attainment 8 scores in 2020 and 2021 were above both figures for statistical neighbours and nationally.
- Attainment 8 for disadvantaged pupils in Buckinghamshire was above figures for statistical neighbours and nationally in 2021.
- SEND pupils in Buckinghamshire both with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and those receiving SEND support performed above the national benchmark for Attainment 8.
- Attainment 8 scores for pupils in Buckinghamshire were also above the national average for all main ethnic groups, both genders and for pupils whose first language was not English.
- Overall permanent exclusions and suspensions were lower than the national average and have been so for the past three years.
- The percentage of pupils in Buckinghamshire schools rated as Ofsted good or outstanding has increased from 82% in 2015 to 90.6% in 2022. During the same period, the percentage of active early years registered providers in Buckinghamshire rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding has increased from 88% in 2015 to 97.5%.

Further details can be found within the [Education Standards Report](#).



Developing the Education Strategy 2022-27

A review of the Education and Skills Strategy began in Summer 2021. The following activities were undertaken to initially develop the strategy:

- Key stakeholders including Early Years settings, schools, governors, educational professionals, FACT Bucks, Bucks Skills Hub and partners in the voluntary community sector were invited to provide feedback through an initial evaluation exercise in September 2021.
- Feedback was obtained from young people and parents and carers at the Shout Out for SEND conference in October 2021.
- Internal reviews and strategic action plans within the council's Achievement and Learning teams were evaluated and considered during Summer 2021.
- Feedback was been obtained from all the School Liaison Groups in November 2021.

These activities informed the development of priorities for 2022–27.

The initial feedback also confirmed that:

1. The strategy must be closely aligned to specific existing strategies, policies and approaches.
2. The strategy needs to have clear and measurable indicators so that its effectiveness and intended outcomes can be assessed.
3. The strategy must take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and identify the measures necessary to mitigate this.

A seven week public consultation in Spring 2022 was then completed and this has informed the content of this strategy.



What did children, young people and families tell us?

Preliminary feedback from children, young people and their families was collected at the Shout Out for SEND conference in October 2021. There was some follow up work with the student representatives (Reps) who were asked about their education and whether their hopes and aspirations have been altered because the pandemic. Further feedback was collated from young people during the public consultation period.

The Reps were asked what their experience has been like in education over the last couple of years and whether their learning has been affected by the pandemic.

Everyone agreed that the pandemic had affected their learning in some way. The Reps explained what they learned about their approach to learning, the importance of socialising, their own wellbeing, and new opportunities created from the pandemic.

Key themes noted were:

- Some students found online learning difficult and learning in general less enjoyable, whilst others found the use of technology to support learning beneficial.
- Many missed the social interaction with other pupils and teachers; some felt isolated and felt that their learning had been hampered by the experience of the pandemic.
- Some reflected on what school and education meant to them and began to realise its importance to their future lives.

Parents and carers raised the issue of having access to vital information that would support their child as they prepare to leave education, i.e. information about opportunities such as apprenticeships.



Key priorities for 2022-27

The information gained from the preliminary feedback in Autumn 2021 and the public consultation and engagement process during Spring 2022 has helped us to reframe the Education Strategy. The vision and aims of the Strategy will remain largely unchanged; being ambitious collaborative and inclusive will continue to be our strategic intentions. The refreshed Strategy will focus on the following priority areas (see figure 2) against which its implementation and its expected progression will be monitored and assessed.

Figure 2: The key priority areas of the strategy



Priority 1. Access to and availability of high-quality educational places

This priority supports the ambition that all children should be able to access high quality education in their school regardless of where they live. This priority also supports the intention of levelling up through the widespread availability of good school places provides the opportunity for children and young people to achieve irrespective of their location.

We need to:

1. Ensure there are sufficient high-quality school places to meet demand through continuous monitoring and review of population projections.
2. Work proactively in partnership with schools, particularly where there needs to be re-organisation or change to existing provision to meet need.
3. Increase provision locally for our more complex young people, particularly with regards to alternative educational provision and post-16 education.
4. Ensure accurate and coordinated school place allocations are completed according to the national timelines for primary/secondary allocation.
5. Ensure that there is sufficient early years education through strategic planning and support to the local childcare market.
6. Support the development and long-term sustainability of early education and childcare provision, and where there is clear evidence of need, develop new and extended quality provision within the sector.

Wherever possible The Virtual School insist on looked after children attending good/outstanding schools. This is the advice we give to all foster carers and social care colleagues. Where a child comes into care and attends a school rated Requires Improvement/Inadequate we will monitor and review the situation each half term. If a child has strong relationships with peers and adults and progress is being made, we do not encourage a school move.

There are rare occasions where the local good/outstanding schools are not the best fit for our looked after children, this might be for a variety of personal reasons. Providing there are no safeguarding areas of concern the virtual school and social work team will work closely with the school leadership and local virtual school to monitor the child's education and well-being.

Measures:

- Total number of school and early years places available in comparison to number of places in demand.
- Increase in the number of specialist school places in the county (please refer to the SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy).

Priority 2: Preparing our learners to reach their potential as adults

This priority supports the intention that through excellent teachers and excellent teaching, all children will be able to access a wide range of learning opportunities through a high- quality curriculum to develop lifelong skills – a key component of the levelling up or closing the gap agenda - and that through improved levels of attendance and behaviour as well as targeted support, pupils should be enabled to realise their potential which is the strategic intent of this priority area. The ambitions of the Education Strategy are in keeping with the 'Start Well' priorities set out by the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board which emphasises the importance of every child having the best start in life. The intention of the Health and Wellbeing plan is to ensure that all children have the best start in life so that they can achieve their potential and this priority focuses on this; this in turn will contribute to addressing the attainment gap and differential achievement which underpins the inequality that the levelling up agenda has identified.

We need to:

1. Provide the best start for all our young learners by ensuring there is sufficient high-quality nursery and childcare provision available for parents and carers to access.
2. Ensure high parental take up of Early Years government funded places for eligible two, three and four year olds.
3. Continue to build upon the Early Years' Side-by-Side partnership improvement journey across all sectors of early years education to facilitate a culture of collective responsibility, inclusion and collaboration across sectors.
4. Work with families to support the most vulnerable children into Early Years provision (please refer to the Early Help Partnership Strategy 2022 and the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service).
5. Work with safeguarding partners, including OFSTED and the Department for Education, to monitor proactively and take action to ensure providers remain compliant and keep children safe in their early years and childcare placement.
6. Work with primary and secondary schools and other educational settings to promote high standards of education, the development of key life skills, such as resilience and independence, and improve the quality and availability of careers education provision to help young people to assess their future choices and make decisions.
7. Support the development of a wider range of pathways (academic and vocational) that will enable school leavers to progress their learning and secure positive labour market outcomes.

Measures:

- Increase in percentage of eligible two, three and four year olds taking up Early Years government funded places.
- Increase in percentage of children from disadvantaged backgrounds taking up the fully funded places for two year olds.
- Percentage of early years settings that are OFSTED rated as good or outstanding.
- The Progress 8 measure for Buckinghamshire is above zero (the national average is zero).
- Increasing the percentage of pupils achieving five grade 4s at GCSE.
- Decrease the percentage of pupils that become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
- All secondary mainstream and specialist schools and secondary Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) achieve all eight Gatsby benchmarks by 2025.

Priority 3: Collaborative school improvement to raise standards

This priority supports the ambition that every child should receive excellent teaching; teacher training and further professional development is key to making this ambition happen, along with the need to have high standards of curriculum provision, attendance and behaviour. The sharing of best practice, resources and expertise through collaborative working between schools will help to drive up standards. This priority will directly impact the outcomes of children and young people by aiming to reduce differential achievement between vulnerable pupils and their peers, as well as ensuring the safety and health and wellbeing of children.

We need to:

1. Continue to address narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and their peers.
2. Continue to develop the Side-by-Side model of school improvement so as to develop expertise within the school community to drive up standards.

3. Work in partnership with schools to embed an aspirational climate through high standards of curriculum, behaviour, and attendance, so that all pupils of all abilities are encouraged to achieve their very best.
4. Increase the support for school leaders and governors to ensure national and local priorities are addressed, with a focus on closing the attainment gap and supporting a culture of safeguarding. This will be achieved through the development of traded services to ensure the continuity of support for schools beyond statutory functions.
5. Continue to build and develop collaborative networks through engaging school leaders and governors to develop a self-sustaining, system-led model.
6. Ensure that schools who are at risk of falling into an OFSTED Requires Improvement/ Inadequate category are proactively supported to avoid this outcome.
7. Work with our partners to continue the development and provision of high-quality teacher training within Buckinghamshire.

Measures:

- Percentage of schools are OFSTED rated as good or outstanding.
- Percentage of children and young people attending a good or outstanding school.
- Reduction in the attainment gap of disadvantaged pupils in comparison to their peers.
- The number of trainee teachers who successfully secure their teaching qualification per year.

Priority 4: Embedding a climate of inclusion

This priority aims to ensure that no child should be left behind; teachers through their initial teacher training and professional development will result in a highly skilled workforce with the expertise that will enable pupils to realise their best. High quality classroom teaching with targeted support will help any child who falls behind to progress by ensuring his or her specific learning needs are met. A stronger and fairer school system will ensure the sharing of best practice, resources and expertise to enable all children who need additional support to succeed; in this way the attainment gap between the disadvantaged and their peers can be closed further, and inequalities can be reduced within communities. This priority also supports the key intent of the Government's SEND and Alternative Education Green Paper (March 2022) which sets out a vision for a single, national SEND and alternative provision system with new national standards, by focusing on the offer of a wider range or 'menu' of alternative education provision in order to support children and meet their needs.

We need to:

1. Share best practice and ensure the effective sharing of information between key partners so that every child or young person's need or situation is accounted for and supported.
2. Continue to work with schools and settings to address the attainment gap for our most vulnerable children and young people.
3. Proactively increase support for children at risk of permanent exclusion or suspension.
4. Widen the offer of alternative/targeted provision to meet individual need so no child is left behind.
5. Effectively identify, track and support our 'hidden children' - cohorts of children and young people who are more likely to fall through gaps in provision and therefore have increased vulnerability (the numbers of which are likely to increase due to the after-effects of the pandemic).
6. To create and deploy a new team of inclusion advisors to help schools operate more inclusively.
7. Working with parents/carers to fulfil their role and responsibilities to support their children in education (please refer to the Early Help Partnership Strategy 2022 and the [Buckinghamshire Family Information Service](#)) and to co-produce wherever possible with families in order to drive forward improvements in service delivery.

Measures:

- Rate of permanent exclusions at both primary and secondary level continue to remain low.
- Rate of fixed term suspensions at both primary and secondary level decrease.
- Maintain high levels of school attendance, especially for the most vulnerable cohort of pupils.
- Reduction in the number of exclusions and suspensions for pupils with SEND.
- Reduction in the attainment gap of disadvantaged pupils in comparison to their peers (see Priority 3).
- To ensure that there are sufficient alternative education places that schools and services can utilise in order to meet a diversity of needs amongst children and young people in Buckinghamshire.

Priority 5. Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of all children and young people

This priority acknowledges the necessity of a high quality extra-curricular activity programme for children and the requirement for all schools to operate in a calm, orderly, safe and supportive way; all key elements essential to supporting the health and well-being of children and young people. This may also include the need for targeted support through individual tutoring and other forms of additional provision so that children can thrive and be nurtured in a positive learning environment. This priority is also a central element of the Buckinghamshire Health and Well Being Plan, which seeks to ensure that all children have the right environment and opportunity to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles and that they are safe and protected.

We need to:

1. Ensure that schools and Early Years settings can access training and support to address particular behaviours that are becoming evident in pupils as a result of the pandemic.
2. Ensure there is appropriate advice, guidance and assistance available to support the wellbeing of teachers and childcare professionals in Buckinghamshire.
3. Ensure early identification and proactive intervention for pupils with behaviours resulting from anxieties that have emerged.
4. Develop a recruitment and retention plan to ensure there are sufficient excellent staff in schools and settings to support pupils and young learners to achieve their best.
5. Deliver key initiatives such as the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme, and ensure outdoor education and other extra-curricular activities are promoted to vulnerable groups of pupils to support emotional health and wellbeing.

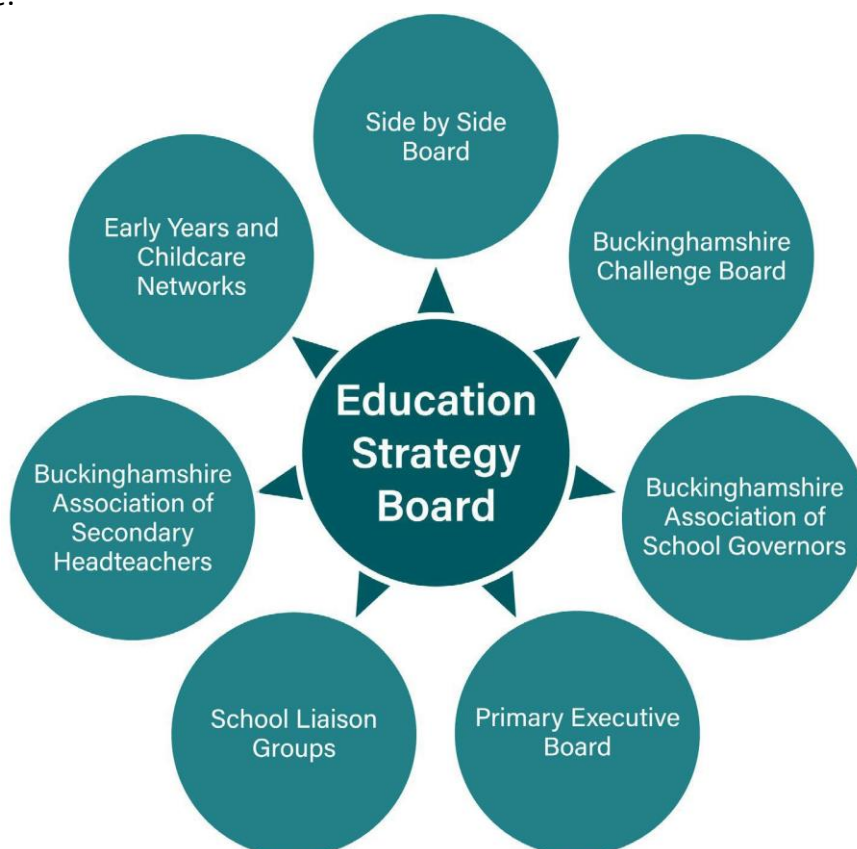
Measures:

- Increase in the take up of eligible children of places provided through the Holiday Activity and Food programme during school holidays.
- Support from the School Improvement team within the council to help reduce the vacancy rate amongst school leaders in Buckinghamshire.



Governance

An Education Strategy Board will provide governance and oversight of the Education Strategy. This group will include leaders from Early Years settings, primary and secondary schools (from maintained schools and academies) and will reflect the collaborative approach to achieving the vision set out in this Strategy. The group will also have links with a number of other bodies as set out in the following graphic, who work together to support and deliver education in the county. The group will receive reports on progress and provide support, scrutiny, and challenge to ensure the implementation of the Strategy leads to improved outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire.





Appendix 1: Interdependencies and Sources

- *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inclusion Strategy 2021 – 2023* (available from Buckinghamshire Council's Schoolsweb [website](#))
- *The Buckinghamshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Education Sufficiency Strategy 2022 – 2027* (available from Buckinghamshire Council's Schoolsweb [website](#))
- *Early Help Partnership Strategy 2022 – 2025* (available from the Buckinghamshire Council [website](#))
- *Education Standards Report 2020-21* (available from the Buckinghamshire Council [website](#))
- *Buckinghamshire Education Strategy - Consultation Evaluation Report April 2022.*
Available on request
- *Happier, Healthy Lives – A plan for Buckinghamshire 2021* (available from the Buckinghamshire Council [website](#))
- *Buckinghamshire Levelling Up Framework* (available from the Buckinghamshire Council [website](#))