

**DRAFT**

## **Partnership for Success - A Strategy for School Improvement 2015 - 18**

### **Introduction and Vision**

This draft strategy has been developed by a group of head teachers working with the Local Authority, to create a stronger, schools-led approach to improvement.

The children of Hillingdon deserve only the best. Our vision is for every child in the Borough to be successful and fulfilled learners, reaching their potential and thriving within inspirational and outstanding educational settings.

The principles that underpin our vision for school improvement are that;

- school improvement systems are most effective when they are based on partnership and collaboration, not power or isolation.
- local solutions, supported by national best practice, are often best placed to drive improvement.
- challenge and support mechanisms across the Borough should be transparent, clearly understood by all and open to interrogation to ensure the greatest impact on outcomes and opportunities for our young people.
- the Council, as a strategic champion for securing the highest standards of education for all young people within the Borough of Hillingdon, will provide appropriate drive and leadership; challenging, brokering and intervening where necessary to address concerns around underperformance.

The purpose of this strategy document is to clearly articulate our vision for education and to explain how we will translate our legal and moral imperatives around school improvement into action.

The central aim of this strategy, which has been developed in consultation and partnership with school leaders and key stakeholders across Hillingdon, is to ensure that all children, no matter where they live in the Borough, access schools and settings that are judged to be at least 'good' and which are constantly aspiring to improve to become, and remain, outstanding.

### **Our Vision into Action**

#### **1. Partnerships for Improvement**

Hillingdon is committed to fulfilling all statutory duties around school improvement and to developing, promoting and, in doing so, championing a strong and effective school-led model of improvement.

It is our intention that, by working collaboratively with a wide range of school leaders and partners, and through the early identification of problems or concerns, we can facilitate any support necessary to ensure the resolution of difficulties with the minimum of Council

intervention. We know that schools have the skills, expertise and ability to meet many of their own challenges and we will work in partnership with them to maximise their potential to develop and improve.

We believe that, within our dynamic and diverse national landscape, we must work flexibly and openly with partners from a range of settings and all schools to drive and maintain improvements and we are committed to developing the school-led improvement approach through our strong links and formal partnerships with our local Teaching Schools, executive committees, outstanding school leaders and through our relationship with our Regional Schools Commissioner.

We will utilise a range of existing networks to consult regularly with school leaders across the Borough and will respond to feedback by communicating regularly with leaders and strategic partners.

Our new Schools' Strategic Partnership Board (SSPB) will act as the central leadership forum for school improvement by developing, promoting and quality-assuring our shared school improvement strategy. This key leadership group is strategically aligned with a range of partners in order to best represent the needs and vision of school leaders and their leadership teams across the Borough and to secure accountability for outcomes for children in and from Hillingdon. The SSPB will act as the champion of our Borough-wide school improvement strategy, providing direction, challenge and innovative practice into our school improvement offer as a result of links with the best of our local and national expertise.

## **2. Five Strands for Success - Our model for school improvement**

The over-arching intention of our strategy is to ensure that, by July 2017, standards of progress and attainment across the Borough will:

- Compare favourably against those of our statistical/Borough neighbours – we will aim that all schools are 'good' by July 2017.
- Match rates of improvement in line with the aspirational all-London measure.
- Are in line with national medians for key progress and attainment measures.
- Demonstrate that we are closing the gap rapidly for young people from our most vulnerable groups. Hillingdon will undertake its duties with regard to promoting the highest standards of education for young people in Hillingdon.

We will do this by:

- Retaining an accurate overview of the performance and effectiveness of all schools across the Borough.
- Collaborating with partners to tackle key barriers to school improvement at Borough, phase/setting and individual school level.
- Encouraging head teachers and school leadership teams to set and achieve aspirational targets for all.
- Identifying and challenging underperformance at the earliest stages.
- Sign-posting and, where necessary, brokering appropriate support in a timely and effective manner.
- Intervening without delay where schools require rapid improvement.

The shape of our strategy is captured in our 'Five Strands for Success' which we are committed to delivering across the Borough to ensure robust whole system improvement.



### **Strand 1: Intelligence and Overview**

The purpose of this component is to ensure that there is an accurate and holistic overview of school effectiveness and performance at all times. The overview will encompass maintained and academy/free school data and intelligence, alongside qualitative evaluations from the widest range of school partners.

The overview (in the form of our School Improvement Overview Database – a tool to monitor progress across all schools in Hillingdon) is fundamental to ensuring that, as a local authority and a community of schools and settings, we know our context in detail, in real time and over time. At whole Borough level, themes (including areas of expertise, best practice and the most positive outcomes as well as areas of concern or challenge for our school community) will be identified via these arrangements and will be shared through our links with our strategic partners and the SSPB to shape improvement activities and interventions. The school improvement function within the local authority will also use information and data from the database to inform risk assessment activities at the beginning of each term and, in

some cases, to trigger consideration of placement on the Borough 'schools at risk register' (please see Strand 5: Challenging Under-Performance).

## **Strand 2: Communication & Navigation to Support**

The purpose of this component is to provide a clear and consistent channel for communication and signposting that is accessible to all schools. Alongside the cultivation of positive and trusting relationships with individual schools through school improvement colleagues regular contact with school leaders, an additional range of mechanisms will be used to provide timely updates on important local and national priorities, opportunities and concerns.

The Head teachers' Briefing and the termly School Improvement Update (which is produced in partnership with the SSPB) will provide operational and strategic school improvement headlines and highlight local opportunities for improvement.

The development of the ENHANCE website (led by Teaching School partners and available to all schools) will complement this process, providing a crucial central point of access for a variety of school developmental initiatives and opportunities. Bi-annual school improvement conferences, led by school leaders and running alongside a wide range of other Borough-wide improvement networks (please see Strand 3: Building Capacity) will provide a broad menu of choice for school leaders who have identified their priorities for improvement and would like to work with partners to effect positive change.

In this way, we will ensure that no school or school leader feels isolated or unsupported in the journey to outstanding and that all schools across the Borough are able to access the support that they need, in the way that feels right for them and at the time that it is needed.

## **Strand 3: Building Capacity for Improvement**

The purpose of this element of the strategy is to build capacity for establishing school improvement networks based on local school improvement priorities and building capacity within good and outstanding schools to be school improvement partners with other Hillingdon schools. The themes for the networks will arise from analysis of the school improvement overview database and will be agreed by SSPB. This element also includes developing the role and capacity of the teaching schools in Hillingdon to underpin improvement.

These networks (established and facilitated by school leaders and other appropriate professional colleagues) will provide the opportunity for schools to collaborate beyond traditional partnerships, settings and phase structures and to examine, develop and share best practice in their focus field. The impact of the networks will be measured using our school improvement overview database and will be quality-assured and reported on by the SSPB.

It is anticipated that the vast majority of schools (and in particular those good or outstanding) will choose to contribute to a network and that their experiences will be disseminated to all schools across the Borough regularly. In many cases, the development of networks will allow for the further development of school-to-school support models, where specific areas of focus are identified as critical to the success of a school at risk of underperformance.

The networks will form part of the diverse improvement offer currently available across the Borough and will encourage the engagement of schools with the school improvement themes that impact across our whole school community, as well as their own school.

#### **Strand 4: Monitoring Progress, Driving Improvement**

In Hillingdon schools are self-managing and autonomous and are, therefore, responsible for their own performance and improvement. Every school is expected to make an accurate self-evaluation of its performance and provision, and take clear and decisive action to improve any weaknesses this identifies. We recognise that effective self-evaluation is the most important process of school improvement, enabling continued autonomy, self-management and excellence.

However, as part of the core responsibility to secure high standards for the young people of Hillingdon, our school improvement strategy recognises the value that many school leaders place on the external validation of baselines - particularly for schools facing challenge, those undergoing changes of leadership and/or governance and those tackling underperformance or underachievement.

For that reason, the local authority will facilitate the provision of school reviews and data analysis to inform individual school self-evaluation and risk assessment. The school review process may be delivered via an outsourced/commissioned model or via a blended model, using outstanding and current school leaders and Borough resource. Our aim is for all maintained schools in the Borough to access a school review at least once every three years. Academies/free schools will also be given access to a school review mechanism on a basis agreed by SSPB. Intelligence from school reviews will be used to inform individual schools' strengths and weaknesses and will also contribute to the identification of thematic foci.

#### **Strand 5: Challenging Under-Performance**

The purpose of this part of the strategy is to outline the processes that will be used to raise concerns with school leaders when an individual school is identified as being at risk.

The Local Authority will maintain a register of schools considered to be at risk. These schools will be identified via the statutory guidance (i.e. Schools Causing Concern) and may also be identified as a result of significant risk indicators within the Borough-wide school improvement overview database.

Placement on the 'schools at risk register' should always result in regular contact with a school and through the provision of support and challenge in a variety of forms. It should be noted that any school judged as 'requires improvement' will automatically be included on the risk register, as will all schools in formal Ofsted categories.

NB. Our strategy recognises that schools judged as 'requires improvement' may be at different points on their journey to improvement and, for that reason, will be sub-categorised:

- **Requires Improvement (RI) (a) = RI but making good progress, with a view to good at next Section 5 Inspection.**
- **Requires Improvement (RI) (b) = RI and not yet making sufficient progress towards 'good'.**

Those schools judged 'good but at risk' (GBAR) will be identified via the school improvement overview database and will always be contacted to discuss their placement on the school improvement risk register.

For consistency and transparency, however, the general guidelines below will be followed although it should be noted that all actions will be taken with careful and professional consideration of each school's individual context and that the guidance below is neither linear nor exhaustive:

**'Good, But At Risk' (GBAR):** Support and challenge visit by named Local Authority representative. Monitoring of progress against improvement plans. Brokerage of additional support where needed. Mitigation plan requested where indicators suggest lack of progress. Liaison with governance support colleagues. Warning notices or use of intervention powers as required.

**Requires Improvement (RI) (a):** Borough monitoring meeting with named Local Authority representative. Check-ins via email/telephone. Monitoring of impact of support as necessary. Warning Notices or use of intervention powers as required.

**Requires Improvement (RI) (b):** Borough challenge meetings with lead for school improvement as required. Leadership and rapid improvement plans in place and monitored as required, no less than every half-term. Brokerage of support via improvement partners including Teaching Schools, Local Leaders in Education / National Leaders in Education (LLE/NLE) networks, Executive leadership groups. Warning notices or use of intervention powers as required. Exploration of alternative routes to improvement, including academisation via sponsorship as required and in line with current educational direction.

**Ofsted Category (Inadequate):** As above – intervention action.

In accordance with our commitment to local improvement and effective school-to-school solutions, in most cases the Local Authority will seek to galvanise support for schools facing challenge from within our Teaching Schools, Local Leaders in Education / National Leaders in Education (LLE/NLE) and Executive Head Teacher networks. However, when appropriate school to school support is needed particularly rapidly and where capacity within our local and school-led network for school improvement is limited, it may be necessary for the Borough to deploy advice and intervention support quickly. Where this occurs, the aim will usually be to agree local school-to-school support as soon as is practicable for all parties.

### **3. Promoting Rapid Improvement - Our approach to schools causing concern**

Alongside this strategic focus and within the remit of our 'Five Strands for Success', the Council will continue to discharge its' essential statutory duties with regard to school improvement which include the local authority responsibility to address concerns when schools fall into Department of Education categories (as outlined in the national 'Schools Causing Concern guidance for local authorities).

**“Where schools are failing or seriously underperforming, it is vital that there is rapid intervention to address the problems as quickly as possible, so that children’s education is affected as little as possible.”**

An important strand of our school improvement strategy (strand 5) specifically addresses the LA's role in support and challenge for schools causing concern. At the heart of the Hillingdon-wide approach to these duties is our belief that preventative interventions through good communication, timely collaboration and school-to-school improvement mechanisms are the preferred approaches to securing improvement.

However, in line with statutory guidance and in cases where life-chances, opportunities and outcomes for young people are compromised as a result of insufficient progress, poor leadership and governance, concerns about the safety of pupils and/or inequalities in achievement for vulnerable young people, the Local Authority will act swiftly and decisively to take appropriate action, within the overarching commitment to ensuring the highest standards of education for the young people of Hillingdon.

Our Hillingdon-wide aspiration is for every school in Hillingdon to be at least a 'good school' and that no schools should be in an Ofsted or LA category of concern. The great majority of schools will be able to identify what is working well and what they need to do to improve, brokering their own support, but for others some additional support or intervention may be needed. It is necessary and appropriate for the Local Authority, as champions of children and parents/carers, to act quickly and broker support where required and, when necessary, to use its powers of intervention in promoting high standards should the provision and quality of education for children and young people be compromised. There is a legal obligation placed upon Hillingdon Council to take action where there are concerns about the performance of any school in Hillingdon, using powers of intervention to act early and effectively to secure improvement in maintained schools.

The London Borough of Hillingdon is committed to fulfilling this duty and acting swiftly to eradicate underachievement and drive up educational standards, so that children and young people are able to learn and achieve irrespective of the school that they attend or the neighbourhood in which they live. Whilst statutory intervention powers for school improvement are centred on the schools which the Local Authority maintains, Hillingdon firmly recognises its statutory duties with regard to all young people in the Borough and is equally committed to maintaining a regular and effective dialogue with the responsible bodies of all local academies and free schools.

Effective schools are characterised by determined leadership and strong governance and have well developed self-improvement procedures. They are reflective, evaluative and forward thinking and take the initiative when building on their strengths and addressing their weaknesses. They form strategic alliances with partners and seek support through collaborative arrangements based on hubs and networks. Their effectiveness is endorsed by positive inspection outcomes and by the high levels of achievement of the children and young people who attend them.

Some schools, however, cause concern because the children and young people they serve have lower achievement than their peers locally and nationally and such schools appear unable to address low performance in an effective and timely manner. Some schools do not ensure that vulnerable groups perform well enough and that any gaps in performance in relation to peer groups are reduced through targeted interventions and good teaching. Some of these schools are unable to sustain incremental improvement meaning their performance remains insecure over time. Where schools cause concern, the Local Authority in its role as champion of children and parents/carers will take action to ensure that the school system

works for every family, using intervention powers where required in those schools who are considered 'eligible for intervention'.

This guidance makes a distinction between schools deemed to 'cause concern' and those that are 'eligible for intervention'. Schools 'eligible for intervention' are those which are causing concern and are subject to a DfE Performance, Standards and Safety Warning Notice as detailed in the statutory guidance. Wherever possible and practicable the local authority wishes to work in partnership with all schools considered to 'cause concern', regardless of whether they are maintained, academy or free schools.

### **Consultation with Schools**

This draft strategy has been prepared by the Hillingdon Schools' Strategic Partnership Board and will be sent to all schools in Hillingdon during September 2015 for their views. A proposed implementation plan will be attached to the draft strategy document setting out how the key improvement issues will be addressed.

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