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| Title of Report: | Schools Performance |
| Report to be considered by: | Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission |
| Date of Meeting: | 16 April 2013 |

Purpose of Report: To inform the Commission of progress in schools performance, particularly in English and Mathematics.

Recommended Action: To note the report

| Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman | |
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Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting of 30 October 2012 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) received a presentation from Ian Pearson (Deputy Director and Head of Education) reviewing the summer 2012 GCSE results.
- 1.2 At the meeting on 16 April 2013, Maxine Slade (School Improvement Adviser) will update the Commission on schools performance, with particular emphasis on English and Mathematics.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 30 October 2012

- 2.1 The minutes of the OSMC meeting of 30 October 2012 record that:

GCSE Results

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the current attainment levels in GCSE English and Mathematics in West Berkshire.

Ian Pearson presented a summary of the report, advising the Commission that the results presented here were not yet validated, and that this would take place in the coming months. Ian Pearson commented that:

- There were five maintained secondary schools and five academies in West Berkshire;
- The reported results were lower than those expected, and predicted, for secondary schools in 2012;
- The issues reported nationally regarding the English GCSE grade boundaries had impacted on results;
- Three of the ten schools had improved their Mathematics achievement by more than 10%;
- Responsibility for improving grades in autonomous schools (academies) now fell to teachers, Headteachers and governing bodies.

The Commission expressed their disappointment that West Berkshire schools did not appear to be capitalising on the advantages of the relative affluence of the area, and commented that indications were that West Berkshire's students would be expected to perform consistently better than the national average. Councillor Rendel was concerned that the performance of schools in the district had been trending downwards over the last three years despite presenting better figures than the national average for two of those years. Councillor Rendel asserted that a better measure of performance was the change over time as this would have revealed the downward trend. Following an in depth discussion and questioning by the Commission, Ian Pearson was able to provide the following responses:

- The five academies within West Berkshire were defined in legislation as independent. The Council provided some services to the schools, but had no direct responsibility for their performance. Headteachers were responsible for the general management of the school and for the recruitment of good teachers.

Academies' performance was ultimately overseen by Ofsted and the Secretary of State;

- The role of the governing body was to review the performance of the school. This required a clear explanation of performance figures to be presented to governors, and for governors to have the skills to set appropriate targets, scrutinise and challenge the school and the Headteacher to ensure the best teaching was being provided to children at all levels of ability. In the case of poor performance, Ofsted would make the final judgement after considering the standards of teaching, leadership and governance;
- The level of support that the Council was able to provide to schools was dependent on the level of core service provided to them, and the services bought back by the school. Influence was very limited where services were not bought back;
- Approximately 40 pupils had not achieved 5 A*-C grades, who would have had there not been an issue with the grading of GCSE English papers;
- Schools had been concerned by two issues this year; the changes to the grading, and the introduction of a new syllabus for which schools did not feel they had been fully briefed;
- In considering what action to take in relation to the grading of GCSE English papers, and in discussion with the Portfolio Holder and Headteachers, Officers had decided to write to Ofsted, Ofqual and the Secretary of State. This communication had taken place prior to the court case aimed at overturning the decision of the exam board to move the grade boundaries by 10%, which was led by professional associations, independent schools, academy chain sponsors and approximately 6 Local Authorities. West Berkshire had not been involved in the court case;
- The realignment of grade boundaries would have affected all grades. English GCSE attainment would now be considered when entering certain Universities;
- Ofqual had not ordered GCSE English papers to be regraded, but had ordered that free resits be offered to all those affected. It was recognised that for pupils leaving education, they would be unlikely to take advantage of the resits, unless they later sought advice from Advizer (previously Connexions) and were recommended to take this route;
- A subject leader network was in place in order to generate improvement in English outcomes. This could involve sharing knowledge or consultant advisors if required. An update on the work of this network would be requested by the end of the year;
- Once the results were validated, benchmarking would be undertaken with national figures, those for the South East, and those of statistical neighbours. This was undertaken annually;
- The Government had announced plans to amend the way in which GCSEs would be carried out from 2014 onwards. This would not affect those taking their exams in 2013;
- The use of the Pupil Premium was investigated in a national report produced by Ofsted and published in September 2012. It was concluded that in some cases the funding was not being used wisely. The Pupil Premium was intended to be used to provide support to identified students (for example to fund tutoring,

teaching aids, etc) to improve their performance. The Pupil Premium was seen as a long term investment for each pupil in receipt of it. Schools should be clear which pupils on their role were entitled to the funding. Ofsted had provided in their report some suggestions as to how the information could be provided to governors in order that they were able to properly hold the school to account;

- Closing the gap in achievement between SEN and non SEN pupils was looked at in detail by the Education Service;
- Whilst the analysis indicated a difference in performance between schools in the East and West of the district, there was no identified geographical reason for this;
- West Berkshire should be aiming to achieve performance in the top quartile of the country. Individual schools should be aiming to improve to the next quartile, and ultimately the top quartile.

Councillor Mike Johnston commented that the performance of academies should be compared alongside maintained secondary schools as attainment at GCSE was the result of several years of teaching, and could not be attributed to a single year as an academy.

Councillor Jeff Brooks acknowledged the improvement in Mathematics performance over the previous year, but agreed that influence over the performance of schools was limited and suggested that to overcome this more Members should become school governors; and the Council's key accountable measures should include measures to enable the Council to monitor more closely the performance of schools.

Councillor Jeff Brooks requested that the Portfolio Holder for Education be invited to a future meeting to comment on school performance. The Chairman agreed that this item might be requested to return to the Commission in early 2013. Ian Pearson suggested that in addition one or two Headteachers be invited to attend.

Resolved that: Ian Pearson be invited to a future meeting in early 2013 to discuss progress in school performance. In addition the Portfolio Holder and one or two Headteachers be invited to take part in the discussion.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members of the Commission note the update and consider any further action as appropriate.

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.