

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 26 November 2012	Meeting Name: Education, children's services and leisure scrutiny sub-committee
Report title:		Council role in education, an introduction	
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RECOMMENDATION

1. That the education, children's services and leisure scrutiny sub-committee notes the information contained in this report, which provides an overview of Southwark's schools system and the council's role to promote educational excellence for all pupils.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Southwark's schools system is diverse, with a broad mix of governance arrangements, including academies. There are currently two primary free schools open and a secondary in the planning phase, seeking a location.

	Primary	Secondary
Community	38	0
Voluntary aided	24	5
Foundation	3	0
Special (all community)	2	4
Academy	3	11*
Free schools	2	0
Total	72	20
* All-through Globe Academy counted in secondary column		

3. Southwark's schools are high performing, with strong and improving levels of attainment. 73.8% of primary schools and 85.7% of secondaries are judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding.
4. Performance is at or above the national average as described in the table below:

Key stage	2011	Provisional 2012	Provisional 2012 national average
Percentage achieving a good level of development at early years foundation stage profile	63.9%	69.4%	64.0%
Percentage achieving level 4 in English and maths combined at KS2	76.8%	83%	79.0%
Percentage achieving 5+ A*-C including English and maths	58.0%	57.3%	58.4%
Percentage achieving passes equivalent to at least 2 A levels	94.8%	95.5%	91.1%

5. The 2011 Education Act and other reforms are creating a shift in the funding and responsibilities to schools, giving them more freedoms to determine how they organise teaching staff, the school day and the curriculum. These increased freedoms, however, do not reduce the council's duties to support children and ensure all receive the best education. Underpinning all actions is the conviction that all children and young people in Southwark schools, whether they are academy or maintained, are Southwark children and the council feels accountable and is committed to ensuring high quality provision.

6. The council's statutory responsibilities include among others, duties to secure sufficient places, tackle underperformance, ensure the education of looked after children, identify and support children with special educational needs, and assist parents in finding a school place of their choice. A further statutory duty to the council in enabling, encouraging and assisting young people's participation in education and training will be to raise the participation age to 18 by 2015. These responsibilities are underpinned by the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people.
7. Locally, the council has underlined its commitment to educational excellence through the Council Plan, and Children and Young People's Plan. These set a culture of ambition and prioritise the provision of high-quality services to enable all children and families to lead safe, independent lives and have the opportunity to thrive, and to narrowing the gap in life outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Governance and influencing levers in a changing context

8. Strong, effective governance is crucial to improving and maintaining educational standards. The council, therefore, invests in providing support services to schools, including a highly valued, traded governor support service to the majority of local schools, including academies.
9. In addition, the council provides a comprehensive school admissions service as part of pan-London arrangements. This work includes in-year admissions, which includes working through the fair access panel to find places for harder-to-place children and young people.
10. The council also undertakes detailed planning to ensure there are sufficient places – a challenging role given the significant increases in demand for reception year places Southwark, and London as a whole, has seen in recent years. A new investment programme is being developed in order to ensure the borough secures sufficient, quality places in the short and medium term. This is being achieved through a combination of temporary and permanent expansions of local primary schools.
11. Work is also underway to ensure as this pressure for places feeds through into secondary provision, that additional secondary places are secured. This is particularly relevant with the raising of the participation age from 16 currently to 17 from September 2013 and 18 from September 2015.
12. Another influencing lever is the support the council provides to vulnerable learners, particularly those with special educational needs. The council has a statutory duty to identify these children and young people and ensure that appropriate support is put in place to support their learning.
13. More broadly, the council also provides support to schools through the early help and special education teams – for example in addressing poor attendance, education for excluded children and for children who are looked after by the council.
14. The early help teams within geographical localities are newly established and support schools and settings including educational welfare, educational psychology and inclusion services as well as additional support around parenting and disability.

Promoting good performance and tackling poor performance

15. In terms of supporting school standards, the council's role is focused on providing support and challenge to all schools alongside encouraging collaboration and sharing of best practice. This is backed by swift and decisive action to tackle underperformance when necessary, working within the system to improve standards.
16. The council's support, challenge and intervention role is discharged by the 0-19 standards team. This team has a range of strategies to promote good performance, from briefings and a training programme to more targeted schemes to raise teaching and learning standards, for example in supporting schools judged as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted to move to at least 'good'.
17. Through rigorous monitoring and school visits, the council identifies schools at risk of underperformance, and develops a programme of bespoke support to raise standards, such as curriculum or leadership development, or brokering support from local outstanding headteachers or schools.
18. In more extreme cases, structural reform such as federating two schools or supporting a change in leadership is considered. The council also has the power to issue a standards, performance or safety warning notice to maintained schools, which could, ultimately, lead to the closure of a school which repeatedly failed to raise standards.
19. As schools become more autonomous going forward, the council continues to develop new ways to work with the growing number of academies or free schools locally in order to ensure all children in the borough secure a good education. Southwark has built up solid relationships with its academies over many years, and these are generally good and mature. Examples include ongoing partnerships through the Building Schools for the Future programme which is refurbishing or rebuilding all secondary schools in the borough.
20. At a recent meeting between academy headteachers, the leader of the council and the cabinet member for children's services, the heads praised the effective council support around attendance, exclusions and behaviour, including the valued support provided by the director of education, the head of standards 0-19 team and the Southwark Inclusive Learning Service, which provides education for excluded pupils, and supports schools regarding young people who are at risk of exclusion.
21. An area for development is improving the sharing of timely information with academies in order to support local planning and improvement work. This includes information on vacancies, fair access, behaviour and support for vulnerable learners, with academies and relevant council teams collaborating and developing new ways of working together. This is particularly required around timely information on absence and exclusion rates, which are local priority performance concerns. The council continues to work in partnership with academies in the borough to share information in a timely way.

Conclusion

22. The council is under a wide range of statutory duties, which it is committed to fulfilling to ensure all children can secure high quality education.
23. In the diverse school landscape, the council continues to work in partnership with schools to share the responsibility for education provision.