

Report of the Director of Education, Work and Skills

Schools Strategy

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The following paper provide an update on the progress made against the Schools Strategy that was adopted by Cabinet in September 2023. It will provide an update on each of the priorities in turn. The following priorities were set to provide a roadmap to guide our partnership work over the next five years. They are intended to build on our many strengths in order to help us achieve our ambitions and ensure our school system is in the strongest possible position to address the challenges we continue to face.

**2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 This is set out against the priorities identified in the original strategy.

**2.2 Priority 1: We will encourage all schools to be involved in a formal partnership with another school.**

- 2.3 Since April 2024 we have supported the development 1 new Local Trust which now has 3 schools within it, another one will join in January 25 and another in July 25. We also supported the formation of another new local trust developing in March 2025 which will initially contain 1 primary school and 1 high school from Stockport. In addition, 2 schools have joined existing local Trusts and 2 more are planned by July 2025.

- 2.4 We have also brokered a very close working relationship between 2 schools which are currently sharing an Executive Headteacher. We also have another Trust leader from a Trust in Tameside who is supporting school improvement work in one of our primary schools. Other schools in Stockport are now in active dialogue about the possibility of joining this Trust.

- 2.5 For the most part these partnerships have been driven by school leaders themselves. There have been some occasions where the Local Authority has played a significant part in brokering the relationships. All the partnerships have been actively supported by the Local Authority.

- 2.6 We now await the impact of the new Children's Well-Being Bill on the national strategy in respect of academisation. Locally, we remain committed to the idea that *formal* partnerships are an important part of the ongoing school improvement agenda.

**2.7 Priority 2: We will deliver our commitment to the restructure of our delivery services.**

- 2.8 During the Summer Term last year much work was undertaken to re-structure our School Improvement Service and our Inclusion Service to bring them together as the new School Effectiveness Service. The new model took effect from September 2024 and has proved very effective. The new service delivery has provided clarity that inclusion sits at the heart of school improvement activity and it has enabled the work of the Inclusion Service to become more sharply focussed around the school's own inclusion priorities. It has also provided further opportunity for internal support and challenge as we continue to develop the practice of our own teams to ensure that we maintain the highest standards of delivery.
- 2.9 The new structure also enabled us to create a small team within the service that works exclusively with our high schools. This has been highly effective in supporting the development of the transition classes within our secondary schools and this has contributed to the reduction in Year 7 suspensions and increased attendance for Year 7. It has also enabled us to engage with school leaders around developing a clear approach to Alternative Provision.
- 2.10 The service is also well placed to be the vehicle that supports many core agendas with our schools. The focus for example this term about Anxiety Behaviour School Avoidance (ABSA), adaptive teaching, social and emotional learning have helped to promote the attendance agenda in all schools. Equally, the team has been able to support with projects such as the Poverty Proofing and Success at SEN Support which are central to our overall transformation within education.
- 2.11 A second key service restructure has led to the formulation of the NeuroDevelopmental (ND) Team and the joining together of Primary and Secondary Jigsaw, both of which launched in September 2024. The ND team has a focus of working with families at a pre-diagnosis level and helping our families to 'wait well' for further referrals. Initial feedback is very positive. The new management structure of the Jigsaw team is also having a positive impact, enabling other cross phase work to develop. This will be particularly important as we develop projects such as the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Well Being in schools which will start in the Spring Term.
- 2.12 The attendance team has been internally re-organised to enhance the support that is offered to schools to develop their own strategic response to tackling low attendance. The new structure has been welcomed and the improved attendance in all sectors is very pleasing to see. Now that the structure is in place, we are in a position to work at pace to develop a refreshed attendance strategy across Stockport Family that will support the agenda from a multi-disciplinary perspective.
- 2.13 Further work is yet to be done around the longer-term funding models for services such as these and others. Our school leaders are clear that services such as the above are key to enabling them to meet their own strategic priorities. Our accountability systems enable us to see that the schools' priorities and that of the Local Authority are closely aligned. This means that we share a common language and a common perspective, which remains a very positive environment in which we can work as an educational community to serve the needs of our children in Stockport. Work is also under way to look at the breadth of our offer of traded services to schools. This work seeks to secure this offer for schools.

**2.14 Priority 3: We will ensure every Stockport school is able to join a local Multi Academy Trust (MAT).**

2.15 The detail outlined in Section 1 shows that 2 new Trusts have been established for Stockport and that we have supported 2 other local Trusts to grow. This, together with one other existing local Trust, means that there are now sufficient Trusts in place to support Stockport schools should they wish to join one. Our local MATs are all fully committed to our local partnerships and are excellent partners to our Stockport Family model, to delivering on our Borough priorities; and share and embrace our vision and ambition for all children. We also continue to work very closely with Department for Education officials to enable this.

2.16 Priority 4 - We will embed our commitment to collaboration with each other, with our partners and with parents, carers and families.

2.17 In Stockport we remain committed to our model of integrated services. Our education teams work well together and this is exemplified by our School Effectiveness Service (which includes school based work, Early Years work, safeguarding, school governance, health and well-being in schools, as well as Inclusion). Our Education Management Group also ties together our work in SEND, our work with care experienced children and those with a social worker, with our work in schools. We also have very clear links with other services within Stockport Family, most notable attendance (see above) and Family Help and Social Care.

2.18 Taken together this enables us to develop strong initiatives, such as a recent development of our Success at SEN Support programme which draws together professionals from across our service areas to develop an holistic response for children and the school they attend.

2.19 Our commitment to co-production also remains strong. We have worked hard in Stockport to refresh our SEND strategy in conjunction with our SEND families. We have future plans to develop the parental voice within the Success at SEN Support and we have strengthened their voice within the EHCP and Annual Review Process. This commitment is also evident through the work of the SEND board, where parents are often invited to be part of workstreams to support our future progress. This partnership is often challenging but is very fruitful and we remain committed to hearing families to support service design. It should also be noted that one of the first activities of our new ND Team was to introduce Coffee and Connect sessions where parent voice is heard and responded to quickly.

**2.20 Priority 5: We will develop a clear strategic and proactive plan to manage fluctuation in pupil numbers.**

2.21 We have increased the number of locally available places for our SEND population. In September 23 we increased our resourced places in the secondary sector by 72. In September 2024 we added a further 24 primary places. In September 26 we are programmed to deliver another 24 primary places and 18 secondary places. Whilst we are proud of our focus on improving our SEN offer, we also know there is more we must still do to improve.

2.22 We have also created 224 places in Alternative Provision, most of which are in one of our PRU's.

- 2.23 Lisburne and Pear Tree have opened as 2 new special schools. Lisburne has 219 places and Pear Tree has 133, 105 for pre-16 and 20 for post-16 learners.
- 2.24 We have also funded a transition class for each high school to enable them to provide a 'soft-landing' to 200 learners as they enter high school.
- 2.25 We have 3 schools that are due to be re-built by the DfE, one secondary school and 2 primary schools. We also have some sites ear-marked for future development to respond to future housing needs.
- 2.26 An updated SEND Sufficiency Plan is being finalised and will be published to members in the Spring of 2025. An external demographer is now under contract with the Local Authority to aid with pupil demography and forecasting associated with Stockport MDC and Local Plan. This will provide a forecasted view on education infrastructure needs beyond 2040.

**2.27 Through our Stockport Family model, we will remain focused on delivering the earliest support for all children and families.**

- 2.28 It is important to note that our education services are part of Stockport Family and we operate a fully integrated model of support. We continue work together closely around Team Around the School and Team Around the Early Years. The Startwell strategy was refreshed with the full involvement of the education services and further work is planned in individual transformation projects. Work is also ongoing with the attendance service to ensure that we have an integrated response to individual case planning. We are optimistic that this will be successful given the integrated foundations that exist and the development of the multi-disciplinary strategy that is underway (see above).
- 2.29 Success at SEN Support has rightly been grown from an educational base, but we have been careful to ensure that the wider family issues are also considered. We are currently working on developing appropriate record keeping to ensure that holistic case files are introduced that will support our Stockport Family model. We are confident that we are considering the role of our integrated model whenever refinements to service delivery are developed to deliver the earliest support possible.

**3. Working with Greater Manchester**

- 3.1 Since publishing our Schools Strategy we have been working with colleagues across GM and at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to identify areas where we can have a stronger focus on education issues as part of the new Greater Manchester Strategy
- 3.2 A paper titled *Breaking Down barriers to Opportunity- A Proposal for a stronger Education System as part of Greater Manchester Strategy* – was discussed and agreed by the GMCA at the December meeting.
- 3.3 The paper identifies a number of priorities which will guide this work. These priorities are:

- To focus, relentlessly, on the Early Years
- Reduce Child Poverty
- Reform Inspections
- Overhaul the SEND System
- Resolve the academy question and strengthen the role of the LA
- The importance of curriculum and assessment
- Enable post-16 to deliver greater alignment with labour market needs and positive outcomes for learners- building on the devo trailblazer agreement
- (For GM to) Be the best place to teach and to work in education across age groups.

3.4 As we further implement our strategy, integration with these priorities and this GM work will be vital.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 We were delighted with the overall academic outcomes achieved in Stockport in July 2024.

4.1 Outcomes in all phases from the Early Years through to Key Stage 4 are all above the national average and we have also seen improvements for our Disadvantaged cohort in Year 1, Year 6 and Year 11. For the first time Stockport's outcomes are either broadly in line with or above the national outcomes for this cohort.

4.2 We are also delighted to report that the improvements in attendance have continued in the new term.

4.3 The Success at SEN Support, together with other work from the School Effectiveness team are also contributing to improved outcomes and the increasing level of strong adaptive inclusive practice in our schools.

4.4 We are confident that these results are being driven in Stockport by our impatient ambition to be a place where we have the 'best schools in the country with every child included in their success'. We have used this concept repeatedly with our school leaders and we continue to work with them to develop both their leadership and our way of working. Our Schools Strategy is integral to this.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 The committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the progress that has been made to date.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Please contact Lynn Perry – [lynn.perry@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:lynn.perry@stockport.gov.uk) for further information if needed.