

Gloucestershire School Improvement Strategy



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Gloucestershire School Improvement Strategy

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Statutory Context

The local authority's statutory responsibilities for educational excellence are set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. A local authority must exercise its education function with a view to promoting high standards. This duty has to be discharged within the context of increasing autonomy, changing accountability for schools and the expectation that schools themselves should lead improvement.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 defined the strategic role of the local authority in the school improvement process:

- As champion of the needs of children and young people and their families
- In the planning, commissioning and quality assurance of educational services
- In challenging schools and, where appropriate, to commission support and, if necessary, intervene in the management and governance of schools and
- Where a local authority has concerns about academy performance it must raise them directly with the DfE.

The 2006 Act required local authorities to respond to parental concerns about the quality of local schools and granted new powers to intervene early in maintained schools where performance was poor. Part 4 of the Act set out measures for tackling school underperformance by:

- Enabling early action to tackle school underperformance so that it does not become entrenched and lead to school failure
- Ensuring that effective support and challenge is provided immediately when unacceptable standards are identified so that improvements can be made quickly
- Securing decisive action if a school in special measures fails to make sufficient progress so that the education and life chances of pupils are safeguarded.

Statutory Context (continued)

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 amends the 2006 Act by:

- Stating that every school judged inadequate by Ofsted will become a sponsored academy.
- Giving new powers to the Secretary of State to intervene in schools considered to be underperforming.
- Expanding the legal definition of the ‘eligible for intervention category’ to enable the Secretary of State to turn such schools into academies or intervene in them in other ways placing new duties on schools.
- Requiring schools in specified cases to work with an identified sponsor towards the making of academy arrangements with a sponsor.
- Removing the requirement for a general consultation to be held where a school is being converted to a sponsored academy.

Key principles underpinning school improvement in Gloucestershire

The key principles are:

- i.** In line with the Council Strategy 2019-2022 which states that we want every Gloucestershire child to have a high quality education, suited to their needs, that equips them with the skills and attributes they need to make a positive contribution to their community and succeed in life.
- ii.** Every child and young person should have the opportunity to reach their full potential and have a positive school experience.
- iii.** Every school in Gloucestershire should make effective provision for children and young people.
- iv.** There is a collective responsibility for the outcomes for young people.
- v.** In a school-led system, responsibility for improvement lies primarily with the schools. The LA has a statutory duty to challenge and where necessary intervene in schools in order to raise standards.
- vi.** Trust and partnership are at the heart of a self-improving system. The LA will share with schools the criteria by which they are judged. LA officers will work with governors and headteachers to determine the level of challenge and intervention from the local authority to ensure rapid and sustainable improvement, brokering appropriate support where necessary.
- vii.** Where the LA has concerns about academy performance, it will raise them with the academy and if necessary with the Secretary of State via the Regional Schools Commissioner and through Ofsted.
- viii.** Strong leadership and governance are essential. The role of governors is to hold school leaders to account. The role of the LA is to evaluate and quality assure the effectiveness of governing bodies.
- ix.** School-to-school improvement networks that are built on autonomy and strong professional relationships are vital to ensure effective support is available to all schools.
- x.** Teaching School Alliances support schools working in partnership to improve the quality of educational provision.
- xi.** Schools Forum ensures that resources are deployed to improve standards using best value principles.

Where are we now?

Education provision across the county includes:

- Around 800 early years settings (Childminders and Day Care) – the highest private, voluntary and independent sector of any local authority in England
- Around 300 schools of which almost one third are academies
- 12 special schools (4 of which are sponsored academies)
- 4 colleges
- 5 alternative provision schools one of which is a free school and one is the Hospital Education Service

Our context is complex and one of continued challenges both demographically and geographically, a diverse population, an increasingly mixed range of schools and settings in all sectors, and increasing financial demands. Multi-Academy Trusts have an increasing presence in the county and there is also a need for a number of new schools over the next few years.

Over the past seven years, the rate of progress of schools in the primary sector from satisfactory/requires improvement to good has increased. In 2011, 64 schools were judged 'satisfactory'. In July 2019, 24 primary schools and academies were judged to require improvement (RI). This represents a good transfer rate from RI to Good or better despite successive changes to the Ofsted framework that have raised the bar. The arrangements for school intervention have been strengthened to reflect and meet this challenge from Ofsted.

In the secondary sector, where the vast majority of schools are academies, the profile of Gloucestershire's secondary schools in Ofsted terms has been more volatile.

Although outcomes for children and young people in Gloucestershire are high overall, the high standards of attainment mask several areas of underperformance and low progress for individuals and groups of children and young people. The attainment gap between children with additional needs and their peers is too wide. Whilst the Online Pupil Survey indicates that children and young people are generally happy and feel confident about the future, there are increasing numbers who report that they are worried about the future.

Where are we now? (continued)

The rate of exclusion in the county is high and there are children at risk of exclusion or who are being removed from school by their families to be home educated as they feel that school cannot meet their needs. Furthermore, the national concern regarding 'off-rolling' is reflected locally.

Our strengths include:

- The clarity and consistency of our school improvement model;
- The commitment of our workforce to better outcomes;
- The quality of challenge, intervention and oversight of schools;
- The range of support for teachers and governors that is provided, commissioned and brokered;
- Our commitment to continuous professional development within the LA and within schools;
- The strength of our partnership with schools and other providers, e.g. local partnerships, teaching schools;
- The way in which the school improvement model has adapted and innovated to maintain the focus on impact.

The local authority is one of many partners in the educational landscape and seeks to use its influence to support and signpost schools to access the best sources of advice and guidance.

Our areas for development include:

- Developing and strengthening our approach to closing the gaps in achievement for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people;
- Increasing the number of schools judged to be good or better in the context of a new inspection framework; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>
- Securing high quality and sustainable external support for schools.

Barriers to improvement include:

- Increasing demand from schools and settings in the context of diminishing resources at the centre;
- School budget constraints;
- The challenges inherent in the management of small rural schools.

A targeted approach to school improvement

The LA identifies schools that require support and challenge and responds promptly to intervene.

The LA uses a range of information and data in order to secure a comprehensive understanding of the quality of provision in all schools and to identify areas of strength and weakness. Accurate risk assessment is a strength of the LA. There is a differentiated, bespoke approach to support and intervention for all schools. The school improvement journey is clear and applied consistently to schools causing concern. A team of Education Leads and Performance Advisers use a set of school improvement tools. These include the project group approach and a risk assessment undertaken with headteachers and Governors.

Support is commissioned from successful schools, local and national leaders in education, national leaders of governance and external consultants.

The aim is to develop and support a self-improving school system.

Schools causing concern – eligibility for intervention

Schools are eligible for intervention where one or more of the following apply:

1. The school has been judged inadequate at its most recent Ofsted inspection
2. Vulnerable in an inspection and rapid improvement is required e.g. the school has been judged to require improvement in the most recent inspection; the school remains good but with a return inspection within two years, there is a decline in standards over time.
3. Standards are unacceptably low – i.e. attainment and/or progress is close to or below the government's floor standards, or are in decline
4. There is a budget deficit or significant overspend and plans to reduce them are not robust
5. Governors do not fulfil their statutory duties; there are persistent vacancies on the governing body and/or meetings are not quorate
6. There are weaknesses in SEND provision
7. Safeguarding procedures are not fully in place
8. Falling rolls make the school vulnerable to budget problems; significant shortages and staff re-structure
9. Capacity is limited due to high turnover, staff vacancies, recruitment or retention issues
10. The safety of pupils or staff is threatened and there is a breakdown in discipline
11. Groups of pupils make unacceptably slow progress and/or significant and widening gaps between some groups of pupils
12. High levels of mobility/casual admissions
13. The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough across the school or within key stages
14. Parents'/carers' perceptions of the school are negative or deteriorating and there are complaints to the LA, Ofsted or the DfE/RSC

Schools causing concern - eligibility for intervention *(continued)*

15. Headteacher vacancy or absence
16. Leadership and management requires additional support or capacity is limited
17. Pupil attendance is low or declining and/or persistent absence is rising
18. Levels of permanent and fixed term exclusions are higher than average and/or rising
19. Pupil voice indicates the school is in decline
20. The school has been identified by the Regional Schools Commissioner as 'at risk'.

Governance and Governor Services

In order to support effective governance, the LA provides a comprehensive central service for governors. A team of governor trainers who provide high quality training for governors and governing boards complements this service. Uptake of training is high and there is regular monitoring of those governing boards that have not secured training.

As a result of highly effective governance in some schools, there are governors in Gloucestershire who have been accredited as National Leaders of Governance (NLGs). The LA has worked proactively with governors to secure leaders in governance and governors who can be called upon to act as additional governors and where necessary, to serve on Interim Executive Boards.

Specialist support

Research shows that schools at risk of decline or failure are likely to benefit from specialist HR advice. An HR business partner for schools is dedicated to the Education Outcomes and Intervention Team. Where the school would benefit from other specialist support (e.g. Safeguarding, Finance, Health and Safety) this is co-ordinated through the project group.

In order to ensure that budgets are used effectively, schools are monitored and potential deficit is challenged robustly by the deficit scrutiny group.

Schools causing concern - eligibility for intervention *(continued)*

The clarity of the local authority's relationship with other providers and impact

The LA seeks to work constructively with academies and sponsored academies. Where schools elect to convert to academy status the LA supports the transition. Where schools are already highly autonomous and successful, the LA respects the decisions taken by the schools to determine their status. Where schools are less successful and less independent, the LA works closely with the DfE and the schools themselves to advise and inform their decision-making. The LA was instrumental in the creation of one of the earliest models of sponsorship in the county and has a history of robust decision making to seek alternative solutions and partnerships with other providers.

Where there are concerns about standards or leadership in an academy, the LA works with the DfE and Regional Schools Commissioner to ensure that the appropriate challenge is given.

System leaders and school-to-school support

The LA promotes strong relationships between schools and academies and other partners locally and regionally through its partnership with school leaders and practitioners. The LA convenes a range of opportunities for partnership working and co-ordinates a number of networks for headteachers, senior leaders and governors. The LA also hosts conferences and leads training. In addition to the role of convenor and facilitator, the LA is an active partner in local school partnerships and associations and the Teaching School Alliances. The LA provides input to headteachers and governors at regional meetings on effective governance and Ofsted issues at key times of the year.

Schools causing concern - eligibility for intervention *(continued)*

The LA brokers or commissions school-to-school support or other support in weaker schools. The LA works closely with the community of LLEs and NLEs in the county to provide support for schools where appropriate. The LA has identified a number of skilled and quality assured school leaders to act as Consultant Headteachers. These are the headteachers of good and outstanding schools who have a track record of leadership within their own schools and who have the capacity to support the improvement of others. Consultant Headteachers work with schools in a number of ways according to their skills and specialisms. There have been a number of examples of very effective and successful intervention from this group of 'expert' headteachers. The LA shares learning and best practice with members of this group to ensure that the consultant headteachers are fully conversant with the LA's school improvement model and policy.

New and Acting Headteachers

The LA provides a structured programme of support for new special and primary Headteachers. Meetings are held six times a year and structured around the information and guidance that headteachers need. This programme complements the support that is available through the National College and through the networks and partnerships such as Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteacher (GAPH and Gloucestershire Associations of Secondary and Special Headteachers (GASH and GASSH).

Headteacher briefings

The LA regularly disseminates information and good practice to headteachers via the fortnightly newsletters (Heads Up), the LA Bulletin Board and via face-to-face briefings. These are routinely held and facilitated by the Education Outcomes and Intervention team.

Schools causing concern - eligibility for intervention *(continued)*

Governors

The LA regularly disseminates information and good practice to governors via the fortnightly newsletters (What's Up Gov?), the Bulletin Board and face-to-face briefings alongside headteachers and through meetings jointly held with members of governors' networks. As a result, governors are well-informed regarding current priorities and local and national developments.

Similarly regular briefings are held for clerks to governing boards.

The Universal Offer

The LA provides a range of services that support and facilitate school improvement. Many of these can be accessed through Gloucestershire's traded services (GCCPlus) and are signposted by the school advisers. These include:

- English, mathematics and science subject leader network; newsletters; secondary senior leaders meetings
- Newly qualified teacher programme of training (in association with Headteachers and Adfecto)
- Closing the Gaps workshops, events and annual conference
- Headteacher, governor and clerk briefings
- New and Acting Headteachers programme
- Single issue school led improvement model
- Bespoke training in response to local needs
- Early Years Service
- Governor Services
- Headteacher performance management
- Other training that is commissioned/brokered
- Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning (GHLL)
- Development of well trained and supported moderators
- Assessment and moderation networks
- HR advice
- Financial support
- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety

The roles of the Local Authority (LA) and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) in School Improvement

The LA: The LA has a statutory duty (as outlined above) to identify schools causing concern and those that are in decline or at risk of failure; to challenge and undertake timely interventions in schools to raise standards.

Where the LA has concerns about academy performance it will raise them initially with the school and/or directly with the Secretary of State via the RSC and through Ofsted.

RSC: The role of the RSC is to work with school leaders to promote and monitor academies and free schools. RSCs operate alongside Ofsted, the Education Funding Agency and LAs in discharging their responsibilities. The RSC's role is to take action where academies and free schools are underperforming; decide on applications from maintained schools to convert to academy status; encouraging sponsors to operate in a region and improving poorly performing sponsors.

The role of the LA is to intervene directly to bring about rapid improvement in schools causing concern.

The RSC commissions other partners to improve underperforming free schools and academies.

Ofsted: Ofsted is responsible for inspecting and reporting on the quality of education that schools provide.

Gloucestershire County Council applies powers of intervention when deemed to be appropriate.

The roles of the Local Authority (LA) and the Regional Schools Commission (RSC) in School Improvement (continued)

Further statutory guidance is detailed in

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-causing-concern--2>

The role of the Local Authority with Academies

The LA seeks to establish positive relationships with academies and multi-academy trusts.

If an academy seeks support or training from the LA, this is available.

Although there is no statutory obligation for academy trusts to provide data to the LA, sharing data has benefits for both parties.

Gloucestershire School Improvement Board

The Gloucestershire School Improvement Board is a light-touch strategic body designed to bring greater coherence to the wide array of school improvement activity in the county through the partnerships (GAPH, GASH and GASSH), Adfecto, the Local Primary Partnerships and the Teaching School Alliances. Its role is not to duplicate these structures. It is to ensure that there is increased strategic alignment across priorities and activities, and to maximise the capacity and effectiveness of the school-led system of improvement.

The board has three main functions:

- i.** Setting the strategic direction: the board will inform a county-wide strategic vision by identifying the most pressing priorities.
- ii.** Building capacity for school-to-school support: through the phase partnerships the school-led system, as overseen by the board, will maximise the impact of the collective teaching school and NLE offer.
- iii.** Addressing areas for improvement: the board will use published data and soft intelligence to enable the early identification of schools at risk and work with them in a supportive and professional way to provide an offer of high-quality support through the phase-based partnerships.

The remit of the board covers all schools, irrespective of type, and all schools will be treated equally.

Education Outcomes and Intervention

Education Outcomes and Intervention has two main functions:

- i. To tackle underperformance in schools and settings and to promote high standards (intervention and quality assurance)
- ii. To ensure that schools and settings are supported and challenged so that vulnerable groups of pupils achieve well (closing the gaps).

All primary, infant and junior schools regardless of status are entitled to an annual visit. All LA maintained secondary schools are allocated an Adviser for this function. Senior officers maintain contact with secondary academies.

Early Years Support to Schools

The Early Years Service is part of Education Outcomes and Intervention and brings together statutory and non-statutory duties of the Local Authority. It aims to:

- Support children to be ready for and to experience good transitions to school.
- Provide advice, guidance and support to reception teachers to ensure that children receive good quality teaching, learning and play experiences in their reception year enabling them to be safely included and to make good progress; thereby reducing the need for statutory school support, reducing school exclusions for young children and improving the percentage of children who achieve a good level of development (GLD) at the end of the EYFS.
- Build the quality and capacity of early years providers.
- Support the growth and development of the early years and childcare market to address gaps and support the sufficiency of high quality places for all.
- Provide a high level of intervention for children with additional and complex needs.