

School Improvement Strategy 2016/2017

Merton Local Authority

Introduction

The Merton School Improvement Strategy for 2016/2017 sets out the Local Authority's (LA's) principles, aims, priorities and mechanisms to ensure that all Merton schools are supported and challenged to continue to improve and to provide the best possible education for the children and young people in their care. We have set this strategy for one year only and will be working with Head teachers and Chairs of Governors over the next 6 -12 months to develop a shared future strategy for all schools in Merton.

The principles, aims, priorities and mechanisms outlined below are not new to Merton, but this Strategy seeks to clarify them and to develop some aspects.

This will be a year during which schools and the LA will be working to take advantage of the opportunities and meet the challenges presented by changes in the national education system, not least those identified in the government's most recent white paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (March 2016), and those arising from the proposed changes to the National Funding Formula.

In this context, it is important to ensure that improvements in schools continue with pace and energy whilst planning for the future is robustly but carefully undertaken.

The LA will facilitate two sessions in the Autumn Term 2016, one in September and one in December for Head teachers and Chairs of Governors. The aim of these sessions will be to outline and discuss options in relation to the future strategy for school improvement across Merton. One element of these discussions will be different models of multi academy collaborations and the possible LA role within these. Options in relation to the provision of school improvement services will also be explored. Through these discussions and partnership planning we aim to:

- ensure strategic coherence within the local education system, building capacity and supporting vulnerable partners; and
- develop increasingly deep, purposeful and robust partnerships with clear accountability.

It is essential that schools take time to consider options for the future and enter into any new partnerships with clarity of purpose and vision and an understanding of how this partnership will lead to improved outcomes for pupils within each partner school.

The current national context and expectations of school improvement

LAs continue to have key statutory functions in relation to the education of children and young people, and hence to securing the improvement of all schools. These include ensuring that 'education functions are exercised with a view to promoting high standards ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and learning, and promote the fulfilment of learning potential'.

In addition, when delivering their school improvement function, local authorities must have regard to the Schools Causing Concern statutory guidance (March 2016). This guidance provides clarity about the role of local authorities in delivering school improvement for maintained schools and for academies. The guidance notes that local authorities have considerable freedom as to how they deliver their statutory responsibilities. Most importantly it notes that LAs should act as champions of education excellence across their schools and the importance of early

intervention and swift and robust action to tackle underperformance in maintained schools. In summary, local authorities which champion educational excellence are expected to do the following:

- understand the performance of maintained schools in their area, using data to identify those schools that require improvement and intervention;
- with the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner ensure swift and effective action is taken when underperformance occurs in a maintained school, including and using their intervention powers, where this will improve leadership and standards; and
- encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement and to support other schools, and to enable other schools to access such support.

Academies are accountable to the Secretary of State, and therefore LAs are directed to focus their school improvement activity with the schools they maintain. LAs are directed to raise any concerns they have about an academy's standards, leadership or governance directly with the Regional Schools' Commissioner.

It should also be noted that local authorities are discharging their duties within the context of increasing autonomy and changing accountability for schools, alongside an expectation that improvement should be led by schools themselves.

The principles and aims of School Improvement in Merton

In this national context, Merton carries out its school improvement functions using the following principles:

- All children and young people in Merton deserve to receive education that is at least good, and which they enjoy;
- Much of the expertise which ensures schools are good or better is located in schools already. This expertise needs to be maximised and shared, building strong working relationships with education leaders in the area;
- Partnership working should explicitly ensure that all education professionals working in Merton, both in schools and the LA, work together for the benefit of all children and young people;
- Support and challenge for all Merton schools is provided on the basis of the rich information gathered from schools themselves, and using the resources available to the Local Authority, including the work of Merton Education Partners and Advisors, and of other LA officers, with Merton Schools;
- Support and challenge is provided to schools in proportion to need. Where concerns are identified, both the support and challenge increase responsively.

Priorities for improvement

The challenge for Merton can be captured in these overarching priorities:

- Ensure a good or outstanding school for every child and young person;
- Maintain at least good outcomes for all pupils and specifically to narrow the gaps for those identified as being vulnerable to poorer outcomes.

The impact of the School Improvement Strategy will be measured by:

- The proportion of Merton schools judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted;
- Improvements made and validated in relation to the Ofsted judgement criteria between Ofsted inspections;
- The extent to which gaps are reduced between underachieving groups and their peers;
- The proportion of children and young people attending a school which is good or better.

Partnership working

Collaboration between Merton schools is strong, and Merton recognises that building on this strength is of paramount importance in seeking to secure the best outcomes for Merton's children and young people. The following are key existing mechanisms for collaboration and partnership working within Merton:

- The majority of Merton schools are members of local school clusters. These are organised as follows:
 - East Mitcham
 - Mitcham Town
 - Morden
 - West Wimbledon
 - Wimbledon

In addition, there is a cluster of Catholic schools, and a secondary phase cluster. Many schools will use not just the cluster relationships, but links with other schools both within Merton and beyond to share and gather best practice.

- The Merton Education Partnership (MEP) is made up of members from primary, secondary and special schools across the Borough, as well as members of the Education Department of the Local Authority. It aims to improve the quality of learning and teaching through collaborative expertise; to share best practice in order to secure high quality provision in a cost effective way; and to develop Merton schools' collective ability to inspire, and support and challenge each other to enrich Merton schools and Merton communities. The Partnership provides financial support for clusters of schools to work together to improve standards in English and mathematics, as well as supporting pupil wellbeing.
- Merton Leaders in Education (MLEs) provide school level support for leadership. This is a local programme, based on the local leaders in education programme. Working within a local programme, MLEs are able to bring a local knowledge of systems and of high expectations for Merton children and young people.
- Primary Expert Teachers (PETs) come from Merton's pool of excellent teachers, and provide hands on support for primary teachers in the classroom, focusing in particular on English and mathematics.
- The Special Schools' Teaching Alliance in Merton provides support for schools including coaching and leadership development programmes. This offer complements and enhances the local offer of support for Merton schools. The Teaching School Alliance also offers a Schools' Direct programme to maximise the new to teaching recruitment opportunities for Merton Schools.
- Teach Wimbledon is an alliance of local schools which, in partnership with the Local Authority, runs another Schools Direct new teacher training programme, again strengthening recruitment options for Merton schools.

Merton also seeks to develop collaborative relationships beyond its boundaries.

- The South West London School Effectiveness Partnership (SWLSEP) takes partnership working for the LA and Merton schools beyond the Borough border. Best practice and expertise is shared through joint programmes of professional development, focusing in particular on leadership, governance and curriculum development.
- Where expertise is not yet available locally, Merton looks to draw on the expertise of education professionals further afield. These include National Leaders in Education (NLEs), National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) and Teaching School Alliances located outside Merton.

Merton School Improvement

Merton continues to:

- Support and challenge schools to remain good or outstanding;
- Support and challenge schools to improve from an Ofsted 'requires improvement' judgement as soon as possible;
- Support schools in responding to national policy changes and government initiatives.

The Merton School Improvement (MSI) team works with schools, providing the support and challenge required. The team comprises inspectors (known as Merton Education Partners, MEPs) and advisors who work with schools, providing both in school support and challenge, and universal, central support, (mostly through continuing professional development opportunities).

The MSI team works closely with a range of other LA teams and services which contribute to the wider school improvement agenda in Merton. These include:

- Virtual School for Looked after Children
- Schools' Management and Information Service Support Team (Schools' IT support)
- Governor Services
- Equalities and Diversity Team
- SEN and Disabilities Integrated Service
- Virtual Behaviour Service
- Language and Learning Support Team
- Vulnerable Children's Team
- Supporting Families Team
- Education Welfare Service
- Traveller Education Service
- Continuing Professional Development Team
- Early Years' Service
- Admissions Team
- Research and Information Service

Monitoring, challenge and support, and intervention

All schools are linked to a MEP, and receive at least two visits a year. During these visits, MEPs seek to work as closely as possible with school leaders in the individual context of each school. Leaders and governors are challenged and supported, particularly with reference to the areas covered by the Ofsted framework, including safeguarding. Advisory support is also available for all schools from the MSI team. The LA's work is coordinated through a high level plan held by the school's MEP.

Where schools are evaluating themselves to be less than good, or where there are concerns about performance, support from the MEP increases. Advisors offer targeted support for identified schools, focusing on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching with regard to English, mathematics, equalities (including for those pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium), assessment, the curriculum and Early Years. Schools where concerns are identified are also asked to work with the LA through Support and Challenge Groups. Further detail about the increase in support and challenge in proportion to need can be found below.

Universal offer for schools

The universal offer for all schools, including central training, is also devised based on the knowledge of local school needs and in the context of the national education agenda. The MEP programme provides a framework for school self-evaluation, and a quality assurance function, giving external verification to self-evaluation for all schools. In general, the MSI team can offer support with:

- updates on national changes and developments
- a quality assurance and accreditation programme for NQTs;
- guidance on assessment, and the collection, presentation and analysis of pupil achievement data;
- identification and sharing of local and national good practice;
- guidance in identifying, analysing, planning for and monitoring required improvements;
- preparation for Ofsted;
- advice and guidance to ensure any priorities identified in inspection are addressed;
- training, coaching and advice on the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teaching and learning; and
- general support for leadership.

Many of the services listed in the section above ('Merton School Improvement') also offer a buy back service through service level agreements for all Merton schools to support school improvement.

School categories and levels of support

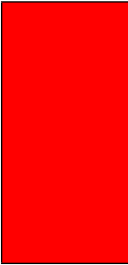
Support and challenge for schools is targeted towards those that require it most drawing on the range of information available, including:

- Schools' own self-evaluation based on the current inspection framework;
- Schools' most recent Ofsted inspection outcome;
- Pupil outcomes (using performance information both at statutory points of assessment and schools' own); and other data including that relating to: exclusions, admissions, staff turnover and vacancies, governor vacancies and financial issues; and
- Schools' leadership capacity (bearing in mind new appointments etc).

For the majority of schools, this information is gathered through the MEP programme. Where this is not the case, for example in some academies, judgements are made through desk top exercises looking at the latest data alongside Ofsted reports in order to assess school performance and detect any signs of decline. The information is considered in the round at the end of the summer term/beginning of the autumn term, and a school category and level of support is suggested, and contact is made with the Headteacher to discuss this. The agreed category is formally shared with schools by letter.

The following criteria are used as a guide when agreeing the categories.

Green	Schools performing well, which may include those that are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'good' or 'outstanding' as recently judged by Ofsted; • with strong pupil outcomes.
Yellow	This could include schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'good' or 'outstanding' as recently judged by Ofsted; • with an uncharacteristic drop in performance; • which have been making improvements but are not yet consistently performing well across the school; • where leadership is vulnerable; • recently moved from RI.
Amber	This could include schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • judged as 'requires improvement'; • where current performance could result in the school being judged as 'requires improvement' when next inspected; • below or close to floor standards; • with a decline in performance over time; • where there are serious financial concerns; • where leadership is vulnerable.
Red	Schools of concern, which may include schools:

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- in an Ofsted category;
 - where current performance could result in the school being judged as inadequate when next inspected;
 - with complex weaknesses;
 - requiring significant improvement with limited capacity to improve;
 - below the floor standards;
 - where there are other serious concerns which will affect outcomes for children.

Levels of support from the MSI team

Following an initial in-depth analysis of the information and deployment of resources at the beginning of the school year along the following lines, support is offered to schools on the following basis and continues to be adapted throughout the year as situations change.

Level of support		Nature of support
(i)	Green and some yellow category schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two MEP visits and reports per year. • Advisory and other support available through the MSI service level agreement.
(ii)	Some yellow category schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four MEP visits and reports per year. • Advisory and other support available through the MSI service level agreement.
(iii)	Some amber category schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six MEP visits per year. • Three reports per year. • Advisory and other support available through the MSI service level agreement.
(iv)	Some amber category schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine MEP visits per year. • Three reports per year • Free advisory support available in line with the school's improvement priorities. • Support and Challenge Group
(v)	Red schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine MEP visits per year. • Three reports per year • Free advisory support available in line with the school's improvement priorities. • Support and Challenge Group

In addition, all 6th forms will receive two days of MEP support across the year. This is in addition to the days allocated to the school as outlined above.

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