

Supporting Schools to Improve to be Good and Outstanding

Introduction

1. The Merton School Improvement Strategy for 2019/2020 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, to be judged at least good by Ofsted, and for an increasing proportion to be judged as outstanding.
2. As schools are supported to improve, the Ofsted definitions of ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ are used to ensure broad common understanding about the meaning of these terms. The current Ofsted framework (as of September 2019) focuses very much on the curriculum, judgements about which are made in a sub-judgement called ‘Quality of Education’. Schools are also judged in relation to the other sub-judgements of ‘Personal Development’, ‘Behaviour and Attitudes’ and ‘Leadership and Management’. Headline criteria for these sub-judgements are:

Outstanding schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of education provided is exceptional. • Pupils behave with consistently high levels of respect for others. They play a highly positive role in creating a school environment in which commonalities are identified and celebrated, difference is valued and nurtured, and bullying, harassment and violence are never tolerated. • The school consistently promotes the extensive personal development of pupils. The school goes beyond the expected, so that pupils have access to a wide, rich set of experiences. Opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests are of exceptional quality. • Leaders ensure that teachers receive focused and highly effective professional development. Teachers’ subject, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge consistently build and develop over time. This consistently translates into improvements in the teaching of the curriculum.
Good schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and including pupils with SEND, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. This is either the national curriculum or a curriculum of comparable breadth and ambition. • The school has high expectations for pupils’ behaviour and conduct. These expectations are commonly understood and applied consistently and fairly. This is reflected in pupils’ positive behaviour and conduct. Low-level disruption is not tolerated and pupils’ behaviour does not disrupt lessons or the day-to-day life of the school. Leaders support all staff well in managing pupil behaviour. Staff make sure that pupils follow appropriate routines. • The curriculum extends beyond the academic, vocational or technical and provides for pupils’ broader development. The school’s work to enhance pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a high quality. • Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education to all pupils. This is realised through strong, shared values, policies and practice.
Schools judged to require improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of education provided by the school is not good. • Behaviour and attitudes in the school are not good. • Personal development in the school is not good.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and management are not good.
Inadequate schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's curriculum has little or no structure or coherence, and leaders have not appropriately considered sequencing. Pupils experience a jumbled, disconnected series of lessons that do not build their knowledge, skills or understanding. • Leaders are not taking effective steps to secure good behaviour from pupils and a consistent approach to discipline. They do not support staff adequately in managing behaviour. • A significant minority of pupils do not receive a wide, rich set of experiences. • Leaders are not doing enough to tackle weaknesses in the school.

The current national context and expectations of school improvement

3. The national educational context provides the backdrop and framework within which this Strategy operates. This has continued to present change and challenge for schools nationally. In Merton, ATTAIN (the partnership of Merton schools working with the Local Authority), has begun to address some of these challenges, perhaps most significantly those associated with recruitment and retention, with finance, and importantly with regard to the continued challenge to ensure that the outcomes for Merton pupils continue to improve and remain within the top rankings of Local Authorities nationally.
4. Within the Partnership, Merton continues to have its strong school improvement team.
5. Despite changes nationally, 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'.
6. In addition, when delivering their school improvement function, local authorities must have regard to the Schools Causing Concern statutory guidance (September 2019). 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 as a starting point to identify any that are underperforming, while working with them to explore ways to support progress;
 - work closely with the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and other local partners to ensure schools receive the support they need to improve;
 - where underperformance has been recognised in a maintained school, proactively work with the relevant RSC, combining local and regional expertise to ensure the right approach, including sending warning notices and using intervention powers where this will improve leadership and standards; and
 - encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to: take responsibility for their own improvement; support other schools; and enable other schools to access the support they need to improve.
7. 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.

8. 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

9. 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

10. 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 improve outcomes for pupil groups, where they are vulnerable to under achievement (for example those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND); pupils that are eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG); pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL); and higher attaining pupils.).
11. The impact of the School Improvement Strategy is 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

12. 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 schools' partnership, ATTAIN, 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.

- 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 Merton Special Teaching Alliance (MSTA) provides support for schools including coaching and leadership development programmes. This offer complements and enhances the local offer of support for Merton schools. The MSTA 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.
- A number of schools (19 at present) are engaged in a peer review process, guided by Merton inspectors.

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

13. 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.

14. 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).

15. 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

16. 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.
17. 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

18. 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.
19. 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

20. 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).

21. 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.

22. 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 (attainment and progress).
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 (attainment and progress); • which have been making improvements but are not yet consistently performing well across the school; • where leadership is vulnerable; • recently moved from RI; • where an Ofsted inspection is expected.
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; • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • where there are other serious concerns which will affect outcomes for children.

Levels of support from the MSI team

23. 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 three 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. • Some free advisory support available following discussion with the MEP, and supplementary 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

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

Support and Challenge Groups

25. A Support and Challenge Group may be given to schools causing concern in any area of the Ofsted framework for the inspection of schools related to the Quality of Education, Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes and Leadership and Management. The LA will use the most robust intelligence available to determine whether a school might be causing concern.

26. Support and Challenge Groups are set up in partnership with the school, through first approaching the Headteacher, with the expectation that each school will engage in the process in the context of the LA duty as outlined at the beginning of this paper.

27. Support and Challenge Groups:

- challenge and hold the school to account for improvements required in line with the school's action plan/development plan;
- monitor and evaluate progress towards those improvements;
- provide the leadership of the school with an opportunity to rehearse key messages about the progress the school is making;
- ensure support for the school is effectively co-ordinated, and broker additional support where needed;
- provide advice and guidance to the school from a range of school improvement experts; and

- enable the LA to get a better understanding of the school.
28. The meetings will usually be convened and chaired by the Head of School Improvement. Support and Challenge Groups will always involve the Headteacher, members of the senior leadership team as appropriate, and at least one member of the Governing Body (usually the Chair). The LA will also be represented by the relevant Merton Education Partner. Where appropriate to the particular issues in a school, other senior LA officers will also attend. Other representatives from the LA or school may be invited to attend for particular meetings.
29. At the inaugural meeting the group agrees the terms of reference incorporating the:
- Main areas for improvement required before the Support and Challenge Group disbands. This includes criteria which would indicate that the school would be judged at least good the next time it is inspected;
 - Timescale for improvements (normally at least a year);
 - Schedule of meetings (at least once per term); and
 - Membership of the group.
30. It is expected that the school drives the discussion under each agenda item of the meeting. This is an opportunity for the senior leaders in a school to demonstrate leadership in a forum where it can contribute to the evidence for the overall effectiveness of the school for Ofsted, as well as rehearse key messages in advance of inspection or monitoring visits where the presentation of information can be supported by the LA. The school is expected to either provide documentation in advance or table relevant reports that address each area of the agenda during the meeting. The Support and Challenge Group gives the school an opportunity to refine its presentation, and reports should not necessarily create additional paperwork. Schools should be prepared with at least an overview of the intent, implementation and impact of the curriculum. It is expected that the school will provide any additional analysis as required or agreed at each meeting.
31. At the end of the agreed timescale, the group reviews the key areas for agreed improvement and determines whether the school has made sufficient progress and/or has sufficient capacity to address the areas in order to disband. In some instances it may be appropriate to agree a slightly extended timescale, or to agree new arising areas for improvement.
32. Following the end of the Support and Challenge Group, the school is supported in the same manner as other Merton schools in line with its needs, and is able to access a range of services to ensure they continue to improve.