

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2023

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools

Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools for the period from April 2022 until March 2023. In the case of education services, it covers the academic year 2021-2022 and activity during that year and then the first half of the current school year.

1. Background

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools, according to the Council's constitution are:

- Child Friendly Medway Champion (including Medway Youth Council)
- Early Career Teachers
- Early Years
- Education Safeguarding
- Further Education
- Further Education and Higher Education Liaison
- Mainstream School Transport
- Primary and Secondary Educational Improvement
- School Organisation and Capital Projects
- School Services (including Admissions and Medway Test)
- Schools Liaison

1.2 Cllr Josie Iles as the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services is the designated lead member for children's services (LMCS) under the Children Act 2004. The Portfolio Holder (Lead Member) is responsible for leadership, strategy and the effectiveness of education and children's social care.

2. Child Friendly Medway Champion (including Medway Youth Council)
 - 2.1. I sit on the Child Friendly Medway Partnership Board promoting the voice of the child – supporting the initiation of projects such as Child Friendly Medway champions, For the Love of Reading, CFM Mascot and the continuation of our existing initiatives like Child Friendly Medway City Halls, and “Seeing is Believing” programming of events and activities for children, young people, parents/carers, families and professionals who support young people. Thus, ensuring that we are positively engaging with young people to actively encourage the voice of the child in Medway.
 - 2.2. The Child-Friendly Medway team have delivered hundreds of free activities and events for children, young people, and families working with various partners including Medway Council specialist teams, local businesses, sports clubs, youth organisations and charities. Activities have ranged from soft-play, drop-in football and basketball, learn-to-swim courses, creative workshops, theatre and film events, music sessions, summer of sport programme (with 36 sessions a week), family sports night, seasonal and themed family and community events, as well as community projects like building a community garden at Strood Youth Centre to learn to grow their own vegetables and fruit. As part of my role, I have attended various of these events and enjoyed joining in some of the activities and engaging with children, young people, parents, and carers.
 - 2.3. In September, Child-Friendly Medway, in partnership with The Pentagon Shopping Centre, Love Chatham, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner and local retailers, held the biggest Superhero event Medway has ever seen with over 30,000 people in attendance. Children, young people, families, and the whole community had the opportunity to meet superheroes, take photos with famous cars from films and enjoy free activities at the free ‘Super Saturday’ family event held in Chatham City Centre.
 - 2.4. Child-Friendly Medway has continued to support programmes in schools by sponsoring the Mini Youth Games, Swimming Charter, October Walk to School Challenge, Climate Change Poetry Contest, and Youth Councils.
 - 2.5. Our independent Youth Council played a vital role in the community by supporting the voices of young people alongside events including Medway Fashion Week, the Walk for Peace, Chatham Carnival, Medway Mile, Medway Pride, Santa Fun Run and Child Friendly Medway events. I have also had the pleasure of meeting with the full council both in a supportive role but also as the portfolio holder.
 - 2.6. The Youth Council, much like the Council’s democratic structures, are elected. Elections took place in June 2022 for one of the Medway Youth Council cabinet positions which lead to the appointment of a new young person in this role. The chair was also confirmed to continue in her current role until July 23. Medway Youth Council currently has twenty-four members; on average sixteen attend the meetings taking place at Gun Wharf. The Youth Council

have also had more enquiries in December 2022 from young people interested in joining Medway Youth Council and Medway Youth Council's priority for the year is to try and make the Council more diverse.

- 2.7. In July this year, the Youth Council delivered its annual Conference on poverty and its impact on young people. 65 young people attended from a range of schools. MYC have reported their findings to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The recommendations are thought-provoking considering the cost-of-living crisis and will be developed into actions to take forward
- 2.8. Medway Youth Council has been working on projects to support the council's climate change agenda and is encouraging other young people across Medway to start conversations around global warming and pollution. Working in partnership with Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School in Rochester, the youth council arranged for a tree to be planted at Gun Wharf. The Mayor of Medway, Cllr Jan Aldous, attended the tree planting ceremony, along with members of Medway Youth Council.
- 2.9. This year also saw the return of the Medway Youth Awards sponsored by Child-Friendly Medway, where 150 young people and youth support staff were nominated in eight categories. This year the awards were held at Priestfields Stadium and celebrated the vast achievements of young people. It was an honour to be a member of the judging panel and to attend the awards in person to celebrate the creativity, courage, and talent of the young people.

Dynamics – Medway's Music Education Hub

- 2.10. I continue to be a non-executive director of Dynamics CIC as the Medway Council representative. Dynamics is a highly successful, cost-effective lead organisation for Medway's music hub, and I am delighted to say the hub and music education in Medway continues its strong recovery after activity was restricted by Covid-19. This has included a return to in person teaching for both individual lessons and classes in schools, and a return to festivals and concerts with audiences. I have had the pleasure of attending both the KS2 Festivals last year (Easter at the Central Theatre and Christmas at Rochester Cathedral), to see hundreds of children coming together from different schools to sign beautifully as one huge ensemble.
- 2.11. Unfortunately, there is some uncertainty for the future of Dynamics due to potential model changes being proposed by Arts Council England. They are pursuing the route of much larger regional hubs, which may jeopardise the future of continuing to maintain a Medway focused hub. The idea of regional music provision is one that has been tried in the past and it failed Medway's schools, children, and musicians. Under this previous model, Medway had its music delivered as part of a larger geographical area (Kent) and was judged by the DfE to be in the bottom 3.5% of music provision in the country. That is why Medway Council, with significant local consultation, decided in 2000 to deliver its own music education provision. Dynamics was established and it became a CIC after the review I led in 2017. Medway is now consistently in the top 20% across all measures, and significantly higher in many areas

thanks to the work of Dynamics and key delivery partners, particularly Medway Music Association,

- 2.12. Dynamics is keen that its vibrant partnership model of consistent delivery of high-quality provision, delivering equal and equitable opportunity that is highly inclusive and effective, with exceptional participation rates, and not least its cost-effective delivery model, is recognised. Dynamics is already working in a way that meets the Aims and Strategic Functions of the new National Plan for Music Education (including early years and extensive SEND provision) and will continue to develop to enhance this. I along with council colleagues, including the Leader, have lobbied the Arts Council England and the Department for Education to recognise the success of Dynamics and ensure there is an opportunity to continue this model of provision following their review of music education hubs.

Medway Go

- 2.13. The Medway Go programme is delivered by the council's public health team and provides children eligible for free school meals the opportunity to take place in enrichment activities and a free hot meal as part of the day's activity. Activities take place in the school holidays, and they have ranged from go-karting, skiing, tobogganing, sports camps, arts and craft, and even a session at the Ninja Warriors at Dockside. I had the pleasure of attending a number of the activities meeting with children and families and promoting the programme. In the last calendar year (2022) 4,039 children attended Medway Go across 30,426 sessions which were delivered by 80 different providers.

3 Early Career Teachers

- 3.1. Schools are required to register their Early Career Teachers (ECT, previously known as Newly Qualified Teachers) with an Appropriate Body (AB) to ensure they complete a successful induction into the profession.
- 3.2. The role of AB for ECT induction will no longer be a responsibility of Local Authorities. The key rationale for the reforms is based on the need to find a cost-effective way to introduce greater quality assurance of the AB sector.
- 3.3. For local authorities, there are no direct accountability mechanisms, however the DfE already has a formal agreement in place with all Teaching School Hubs and holds them to account against key performance indicators. This relationship with Teaching School Hubs provides an existing mechanism through which to introduce more robust quality assurance without the need to set up a costly and duplicative quality assurance or accreditation system with Local Authorities.
- 3.4. Following a national consultation regarding a timeline for changes, local authorities ABs will continue until the end of August 2024. Partnership working between the local authority and Teaching School Hub to support the transition of this is underway.

4 Early Years

- 4.1. Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare provision, as far as reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment. Medway early years sufficiency team engage with all early years' providers across Medway, facilitating access to the government funded childcare offer and providing support for Medway children to achieve and be ready for school.
- 4.2. The Medway Family Information Service (FIS) is part of the early years sufficiency team and acts as a brokerage service to Medway families, who require early years provision for two-, three- and four-year-olds, including children with special educational needs. The FIS can also support Medway families in many aspects of family life, such as childcare choices, parenting support, welfare assistance and is a free confidential service. The Family Information Service directory has a wealth of services for families to access and a telephone service for families and practitioners.
- 4.3. Currently there are 237 childcare providers registered with Medway Council to deliver government funded childcare, this equates to 103 childminders, forty-two school nurseries and ninety-two private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings. Medway early years providers have sufficient registered places to accept all the potentially eligible children who are two, three, and four years old.
- 4.4. Since January 2022 to January 2023, there have been nineteen new providers registered with Medway Council offering funded childcare. Childcare provision throughout Medway continues to be of a high standard as shown in the table below. Good quality Early Years settings make a significant impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds through providing access to resources and experiences they might not have at home. Quality settings can reduce gaps in development for children and support all children in being ready for school.

Type of provision	Total number of providers inspected	% Achieving good or outstanding
Childminders	95	91%
Nursery classes in schools	41	98%
Private and voluntary nurseries	81	98%

5 Education Safeguarding

- 5.1. For the purposes of this report the term Education Safeguarding (EST) is used, whilst this is not an officially adopted term at this time it recognises the expansion of the team, which currently includes an additional Education Safeguarding Officer and the MASH Education Lead.

The Education Safeguarding Team

- 5.2. The role of the EST has expanded in the past year to include an additional Education Safeguarding Officer and a MASH Education Lead. The EST has line management responsibility for the Education Safeguarding Lead. The strength of relationship of the EST with schools supports the work of the Education Lead and enables any school practice issues identified by MASH to be quickly and effectively addressed, thus improving safeguarding for Medway children.
- 5.3. The EST has responsibility for overseeing the quality of safeguarding practice in Medway schools and offering advice and guidance on safeguarding enquiries to school leaders and their safeguarding officers.
- 5.4. The EST supports schools, and other education settings, to develop best policy, practice, and safeguarding culture. The service identifies and responds to wider safeguarding concerns and highlights emerging themes in safeguarding. This includes giving advice, signposting, developing, and sharing training and resources, liaising with other services within the Local Authority and working in partnership with outside agencies. Consultations with schools are recorded and reviewed to identify themes to ensure that training priorities can be targeted to areas of need.

Complaints Management

- 5.5. When a complaint about a school (CAS) is made to Ofsted, the regulator does not have the power to investigate complaints regarding the welfare of an individual child and passes the CAS to the Local Authority. Due to a new reporting system, complaints about independent or trust governed schools are beginning to come directly from the DfE.
- 5.6. Between April 2022 and February 2023 there have been 51 CAS received from Ofsted, this is an 100% increase on the previous 12 months. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in requests for assurance about the quality of safeguarding practice in schools, from the DfE – 9 have been requested since Sept 2022 the EST has responded to five complaints about school safeguarding made directly to the Local Authority by parents or other partners.

Prevent

- 5.7. The EST continues to work closely with the Prevent Education Officer (PEO) for Medway, North and West Kent, to promote and create awareness of the Prevent agenda in Medway schools. The PEO newsletter is circulated via the EST to ensure Medway schools are up to date with knowledge, information and the training that is offered. The PEO has presented at the DSL meetings held in October, which led to her being booked to train in several Medway schools. In January, the EST coordinated an online session for schools run by the PEO, and another is booked for March.

6 Further Education and Higher Education Liaison

- 6.1. Medway Council has successfully established the Kent & Medway Careers hub within Medway. The hub facilitates businesses working with secondary schools to improve the quality and breadth of their careers strategies and programmes. This is achieved through recruiting senior leaders from businesses and organisations to become Enterprise Advisers, they work with the Enterprise Coordinators in Medway and school senior leadership teams to support embedding the nationally accepted framework for good careers education, information, advice and guidance. These are called the Gatsby Benchmarks and the areas include:
- encounters with employers
 - experience of the workplace
 - informed about further and higher education options
 - addressing the needs of all students.
- 6.2. There are twenty mainstream schools, one college, one standalone sixth form, 3 SEND schools and three alternative provisions in the network to date. The network has thirty-one active Enterprise Advisers from a range of different sized companies and varying sectors. All schools/colleges in Medway can access full support from the Enterprise Coordinator/Enterprise Advisers and they are invited to Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) network meetings three times per academic year. All Enterprise Advisers have opportunities for continuous professional development to support them in their roles and are invited to networking events three/four times per academic year.
- 6.3. The focus this year has been on ensuring continued coverage of Enterprise Advisers and improving Gatsby benchmark scores across all benchmarks. All educational institutes have remained matched, above the national average. Furthermore, educational institutions achieved an average of 6.3 benchmarks compared to a national average of 5.1.
- 6.4. I am a member of the Council's Skills Board which has driven forward the Kent & Medway Careers Hub in Medway and provides oversight of its delivery. Medway Council (as a major employer) has engaged very well with the programme and the Network. The Network has supported different Council departments with information sharing to schools and businesses. These include the youth service, economic development, and public health.
- 6.5. We are in the process of conducting a post sixteen review that will provide a detailed review of the education, training and employment offer available to young people aged 16-19 (up to aged twenty-five for those with an Education, Health, and Care Plan). The review aims to expand the options and life chances of our young people by improving the education, skills, and training opportunities available to them; we want to develop a richer and deeper understanding of the key issues that young people and post-sixteen providers in Medway face, and how these can be addressed.

- 6.6. The review will provide a diagnostic of the breadth and inclusivity of current post-sixteen options in Medway, identify and evidence areas for development, and provide recommendations for improvements that the Council and its partners can take forward.
- 6.7. Our overall aim is to ensure as wide a range of opportunities as possible are available and accessible to our young people, that they are adequately informed and advised about them, and that they are supported as they progress into and through post-sixteen provision. This will help ensure that they achieve in their chosen post-sixteen route, and that they are in a good place at age nineteen to make further progress in their young adult lives.
- 6.8. Further and Higher Education representatives continue to be designated members of the Medway Education Partnership. They have an important role to play and offer a different perspective on education and the childrens system in Medway. I have also had the pleasure of attending a number of graduation ceremonies at Rochester Cathedral over the last year, these are always wonderful occasions, but as many of these students had their learning disrupted and ceremonies delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic it was even more special to mark these achievements.

7 Mainstream School Transport

- 7.1. The Council provides mainstream school transport to those eligible under the policy which is reviewed and revised as appropriate and published on the Council's website. The total spend on transport has seen year on year increases as pupil numbers rise, and transport costs escalate. Currently, there are 1656 pupils eligible for transport. This is provided in the form of a bus pass, a rail card or fuel allowance. The council also remains committed to providing the MY routes 'yellow buses' to provide dedicated school buses on key routes, including grammar schools.
- 7.2. Transport, in the form of dedicated school buses, is being provided to transport the year 7 pupils at Maritime Academy from Strood to their temporary site at Twydall Primary School. This will remain in place until they are able to relocate into their permanent site at Frindsbury, which is expected to be September 2024.

8 Primary and Secondary Educational Effectiveness

- 8.1. Our priority, as a Council, remains that all schools and academies should be good or outstanding so that all children and young people get access to a good education. With most schools in Medway now academies the role of the council is focused on system leadership, whilst also holding schools and trusts to account regarding the effectiveness of their provision. The Lead Member and I, supported by officers, continue to work in partnership with education leaders, governors, trusts, the Regional Director (RD), the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted collaboratively to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people in Medway. I have also continued to visit schools

across Medway, meeting with school leaders and pupils, seeing learning taking place in classrooms and touring facilities.

- 8.2. At the end of the academic year 21/22, 89% of Medway secondary schools were judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding, compared to 81% nationally and 92% of Medway primary schools were judged good or outstanding compared to 90% nationally. We also maintain our own records across of an array of measures and this combined with other information enables the council to have a strong grasp of strengths and areas for improvement at an individual school level.

School support

- 8.3. The School Effectiveness team works alongside leaders and in collaboration with the wider strategic education partnerships within Medway and across the Southeast region. Within the national landscape of change, the focus of this team is to bring strategic coherence and effectiveness to the local education system. The service fulfils the statutory duties of the Council, which are broadly contained within the 1996 Education Act 13a, *to promote high standards within education*, permeating all aspects of the Council's plans.
- 8.4. This educational excellence role is the responsibility of the Director of Children and Adult Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services, supported by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools; operational effectiveness is distributed primarily through the School Effectiveness Team. The first strategic council plan priority is the driver for all School Effectiveness work, aiming to enable *all children to achieve their potential in schools*. School Effectiveness works in partnership, in many cases in a leading role, with the following groups to realise this ambition:
- Medway Education Partnership Group
 - Medway headteacher associations (MELA and MSHA)
 - The four Medway zones
 - SEND Partnership Board
 - Medway Cultural Strategy
 - Child Friendly Medway
 - Thames Gateway Teaching School Hub Partnership Board
 - Medway and Swale ICP (Integrated Care Partnership) Children's Clinical and Professional Advisory Board
 - Medway Emotional Health and Well Being Board
- 8.5. The service is committed to strengthening the operational and independent effectiveness of school system leaders, so that they can champion the child and realise the Council's vision for all pupils. Furthermore, the relationship between Council officers and the Regional Director is well established, enabling regular dialogue and the sharing of intelligence for the benefit of all children and young people.

- 8.6. At a school level, the service works with leaders to support professionals to make a positive impact on the goals they seek and aspire to achieve. The service supports colleagues at all points of their career from early career teachers to executive leaders and into system leadership in partnership with the Teaching School Hub and Canterbury Christ Church University.
- 8.7. School Effectiveness also work with school leaders to support and go beyond the national curriculum remit and offer a conduit for integrated working for services across the Council promoting education and awareness of initiatives including climate change, community and diversity, obesity, Child Friendly Medway, and Positive Behaviour Support programmes.
- 8.8. Colleagues in education who evidence success with learners, are often drawn upon to promote best practice and professional development within learning zones. Furthermore, work with the Teaching School Hub offers the potential to further expand local professional networks and accreditation.
- 8.9. A key achievement across the education service has been the co-ordination of intelligence and the registering of risk across the wider education service. In 2022, this included the following areas: school effectiveness, attendance, inclusion, safeguarding, SEND, admissions, finance, governance, health, and safety, human resources, and property.

The Medway Education Partnership Group (MEPG)

- 8.10. The partnership continue to go from strength to strength and in 2022 the partnership reviewed its Vision and Priorities and identified the following four areas of focus:
 - **Quality of Education:** All children and young people in Medway access high-quality, inclusive education provision and are appropriately supported to achieve their potential.
 - **Leadership and Management:** Services provided to children and young people in Medway, to support their education and development, are provided in a timely way; demonstrate value for money; operate within robust and efficient processes; and are informed by the voice of children, young people, and their families.
 - **Inclusion:** All children and young people are educated and supported within the local provision(s) most appropriate for their needs.
 - **Health and Wellbeing:** Children and young people in Medway are healthy and resilient and supported throughout their education and development to continue to lead healthy and positive lives into adulthood.
- 8.11. Through their meetings the partnership focusses on each priority twice a year, looking at KPIs and areas for development that are taken back through their respective groups. Groups represented include head teachers (both maintained and academy schools), Mid Kent college, academy trust chief executives, the early years sector, the Regions Group (formerly the Regional

Schools Commissioner), governors, universities, independent schools, and the Teaching School Hub.

Curriculum Diversity

- 8.12. The Council has a statutory duty to promote high standards of education for all learners in Medway. A good understanding of the historic and inspiring achievements of our local role models from all backgrounds is an essential component of a balanced history curriculum. The scope for this is already within the national curriculum but does not go as far as to detail names and events in each locality; this is very much the responsibility of each locality. Though there is no statutory expectation to define a local curriculum, nor are academies required to teach the national curriculum, Ofsted would expect that the curriculum serves pupils with a high level of cultural capital from their locality, past and present, their place within it and their responsibility to serve others through model citizenship and British Values.
- 8.13. During the academic year 21/22, a task and finish group of school leaders was established to take the diversity agenda forward, which I personally chaired. Two work strands took place to promote local heroes, one to collect hidden stories from communities in Medway; and the second to create some resources that schools can integrate into the curriculums they use currently. The focus is also upon the sharing of examples of good practice amongst schools and there is the potential for further creation of teaching and learning resources that promote the existing diversity in Medway's rich history.

The Reading Collaborative

- 8.14. In the academic year 21/22, thirty-four leaders from across Medway's primary and special schools came together to work collaboratively and address the key improvement priority of enabling children to read to the expected standard at key stage 2. With the pandemic likely to have further hindered children's reading, leaders were keen to tackle this pivotal issue and halt further decline. Framed by a paper from the School Effectiveness team, the leaders initially met to address shared barriers to learning and pool their expertise with a focus on getting as many learners as possible on track for a life of reading, success, and pleasure.
- 8.15. By facilitating such collective discussion, system leadership is promoted and sessions encourage joint problem solving and sharing of best practice on a wide range of issues associated with reading, from effective lockdown recovery, KS2 progress, vocabulary rich classrooms to positive parent reading role models.

8.16. The reading collaborative identified four priority areas which informed subsequent planning of events and underpinned school to school sharing of best practice:

1. Supporting SEND readers in Y5&6
2. Maximising parental engagement
3. Unsticking stuck readers
4. Building a rich vocabulary school

8.17. Currently, the focus of the collaboration has moved from the previously identified priorities onto:

- Enabling learners to transfer reading skills into their writing.
- Ensuring learners are equipped to read to a standard required as they transfer from primary into secondary education

8.18. The work of the reading collaborative has been supplemented by the following partners:

- Christ Church University - leading on addressing barriers to effective teaching of reading, reading for pleasure and a recent introduction of an online book club to support the teaching, and learning of reading through quality texts.
- Kingsnorth English Hub – offering access to a wide range of DfE funded CPD opportunities, including phonics programmes, the teaching of reading and a scheme to transform reading culture within schools.
- Medway libraries and The Reading Agency have introduced Medway schools to a range of reading resources to promote health and well-being addressing themes within this area: healthy minds, feelings, worries, the world around you, dealing with tough times and when you have a condition.

9 School organisation, capital projects and School Services (including admissions and the Medway Test)

9.1. The School Organisation and Capital Services team ensure that sufficient good quality school places are available to meet demand when and where it is needed. This must be achieved within a limited budget and to a strict timeframe via the Capital Programme Board. The Council continues to be committed to the provision of grammar schools in Medway and the work to ensure we can maintain this provision is detailed in section 9.6 of the report.

9.2. The team is also responsible for ensuring that maintained schools are quality learning environments, but the condition of academy schools is the direct responsibility of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

- 9.3. This has been another challenging year for the projects team as the availability of contractors and supplies is inconsistent, with costs escalating quickly. However, the team has continued to deliver the necessary capacity required to meet demand for school places across Medway, including sufficient specialist space to enable schools to meet the full curriculum where additional pupils have been admitted. Plans continue to ensure sufficient places and facilities are available.
- 9.4. Further bulge places were created to meet the demand and every pupil who required a place was provided with one. All secondary schools have worked with the council to provide these places in a great example of continued partnership working and collaboration.
- 9.5. The DfE are funding and delivering the two new secondary free schools in Medway for 2300 pupils, these are now both open, with Leigh Academy Rainham operating from its permanent site and the Maritime Academy, open in temporary accommodation at Twydall Primary School. Current expectations are that the new building in Strood will be ready to occupy from September 2024. The DfE will invest around £75m in these two schools.
- 9.6. In the selective sector, approximately £4.9m of investment has created over 600 additional places in our grammar schools in recent years, sufficient capacity is available for all Medway resident pupils who are deemed as grammar through the Medway Test. Measures to prioritise places for Medway children (whilst adhering to the Greenwich ruling) include: school admissions policies; access areas for pupils on the peninsula; supporting the further expansion of schools as funding becomes available; and organising provision to enable an increase in the proportion of Medway pupils.
- 9.7. To facilitate this, the proposal for three grammar schools to become co-educational is in the final stages, with business cases submitted to the Regional Schools Director for determination. These proposals will be implemented from September 2024, and at that point, the proportion of Medway pupils able to achieve a pass in the test will increase from a current maximum of 25% to a maximum of 28%.
- 9.8. We continue to explore the option of a grammar school satellite/annexe on the peninsula to meet increasing demand. Currently over 1250 pupils attend grammar schools from Strood and the peninsula, this creates travel patterns which contribute to traffic congestion. Having such a provision will reduce traffic levels and the amount of time pupils spent travelling.
- 9.9. All Medway grammar schools now admit pupils based upon distance rather than on the score achieved in the test. As a result, Medway resident children have a much stronger opportunity to attend a Medway grammar school and will not be disadvantaged by out of area residents who achieved a higher score in the Test.

- 9.10. In the primary sector actions taken since 2013 to create over three thousand additional places, costing more than £33m, as reported to this committee in recent years, has meant that sufficient places are available for all pupils who require a place, and whilst there are some areas of pressure, for example around Hoo, there are sufficient places in neighbouring areas to meet this demand. However, as the demand for places in the Hoo area is expected to continue, the Council has approved the expansion of Hundred of Hoo Primary provision by one form of entry. It is planned that the additional capacity will be ready for September 2023 with anticipated costs of £2.8m.
- 9.11. The new Rochester Riverside Primary School has opened in temporary accommodation due the financial failure of the contractor meaning that the building was not ready. In the interim the school has been sited on the Pilgrim Primary school site, which is part of the same Trust. Transport is provided for the pupils. The building work on the permanent school is back underway and is expected to be ready for September 2023. When complete the school will be a 2-form entry school catering for 420 pupils.
- 9.12. We continue to monitor places through robust forecasting, which is recognised by central government as consistently accurate, and any areas of emerging demand are addressed in good time. The annual review of the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27 is presented to Cabinet and this committee each autumn, highlighting the successes of the capital programme, and outlining future needs and proposed actions.
- 9.13. Schools continue to convert to academy status, but the rate has slowed significantly and as of January 2022 there are seventy-six academies out of 103 schools (73.7%). There are currently no approved academy conversions in the pipeline. The number of schools (103) includes the opening of the two secondary Free Schools, and Rochester Riverside Primary School.
- 9.14. The schools' condition programme continues to be managed within budget ensuring school environments are warm, safe, dry, and are compliant for the children and staff. The Condition Programme covers maintained schools only; academies are funded directly from the ESFA for their maintenance and condition work. The programme of work has been challenging during the past 18 months due to supply and contractor issues, but a programme for 2023 is being developed to ensure the available funding is used in the most effective way.
- 9.15. The Medway Test has provided an immense challenge for the department for the last three years due to Covid-19, but exceptional planning, and exemplary partnership working between officers and schools led to the test being delivered to 3731 pupils, the highest number to date, in a safe environment. Testing was undertaken over a whole weekend rather than a single day for out of area pupils, and feedback from parents and schools was positive regarding the way the process was undertaken.

9.16. Planning for the Medway Test is underway for the 2024 intake of pupils, and we are again working closely with schools to ensure the fairest and most appropriate testing process is in place. Feedback from schools indicates that they would support the permanent continuation of some of the measures taken over recent years and we are collaborating with schools with this in mind. This includes testing out of area pupils over more days to reduce the numbers on site and restricting the number of adults who can attend with each pupil.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None

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