



Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership Board

Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership Annual Report September 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the second annual report of the Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership, reflecting the work of the Partnership from September 2016 to July 2017.

1.2 Oxfordshire's Strategic Schools Partnership Board (SSPB) brings partners together to promote the development of sustainable school to school support across the county and to identify key priorities for school improvement to benefit all schools in the county. The Board's aspiration is to raise standards and support all children and young people in the county to be educated in schools that are good or outstanding.

2. Priorities

2.1 In order to meet this aspiration, a number of priorities were identified in September 2016 and agreed by the Board as the focus for work over the first two years:

- Close the performance gap between vulnerable learners and their peers;
- Improve achievement of those with SEND;
- Improve attendance;
- Support effective recruitment and retention;
- Encourage higher quality alternative provision;
- Reduce fixed term and permanent exclusions;
- Support the development of leaders and managers in schools and settings.

2.2 It is agreed that the range of these priorities was too ambitious and the Board has not been able to address all of them, but this report addresses those areas where progress has been made. In September 2017, the Board will review its priorities for the coming two years, when 2017 data is available and focus on a smaller number to ensure greater clarity and achieve robust outcomes.

3. Key achievements to date include:

3.1 The development of the **Operational Group** has been a strength this year. A new chair of the group has been appointed and she has brought rigour and determination to the group. The Operational Group was established to promote communication between

stakeholders and ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to the provision of support available for Oxfordshire schools and to avoid duplication. It is comprised of partners from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Oxfordshire Teaching School Alliance (OTSA), the Diocese of Oxford, the Mulberry Bush Outreach Teaching School Alliance, and headteacher representatives from primary and secondary schools, who meet monthly.

3.2 At each meeting, data and information such as Ofsted outcomes are carefully considered to identify schools where support might be needed, in addition to requests for support received directly from schools. All discussions take place within an agreed data-sharing protocol to ensure confidentiality for schools involved. Potential support packages are discussed, including identification of who might be best placed to provide the support, usually a System Leader such as a Local or National Leader of Education, a member of an OCC team or a School Link Advisor from the Diocese. The details of the support are discussed and agreed with schools, and funding streams for the support are established. Once the work is undertaken, its impact is assessed and reported back to the SSPB.

3.3 The Operational Group also considers specific projects and funding opportunities that could benefit Oxfordshire schools. For example, the Operational Group has ensured a coordinated approach to placing bids via the NCTL School to School Support Fund. As a result of this approach and the excellent work of National Leaders of Education in preparing the bids, a number of Oxfordshire schools are benefiting from over £180,000 of funding from successful applications in the two most recent funding rounds. They have also been instrumental in the bids to the Strategic School Improvement Fund, submitted by OTSA on behalf of the SSPB, the outcomes of which will be known in the Autumn term.

3.4 There has been continuing work to establish the **Board**, engaging schools and partners so that the work includes all key partners in the current educational landscape in Oxfordshire. The consistent attendance and engagement at Board meetings of all partners is testament to the commitment felt by all. The membership has remained largely unchanged for the first two years, although now three members are stepping down, two due to retirement and the other because of promotion to another organisation. Replacements will be identified by the organisations they represent, as reflected in the SSPB Constitution.

3.5 Feedback was gathered at the Oxfordshire Headteachers conference in March 2017 about the progress and profile of the Board. As a result of this feedback, communication was identified as a key concern. The SSPB now produces a **termly newsletter** informing schools of projects and outcomes. This annual report will also be widely circulated to inform stakeholders of progress. It will go to the Oxfordshire County Council Education Scrutiny committee, to Schools Forum, the Oxfordshire Governors' Association and via *Schools News* to all schools.

3.6 Colleagues at Oxford University and Oxford Brookes worked on an SSPB sponsored project to investigate issues around the **recruitment and retention of teachers** in Oxfordshire. They spoke at the Heads and Chairs briefings about this work and attended the Education Scrutiny committee. This has resulted in:

- more direct collaboration between the universities and the sector in their recruitment of new teachers;
- the professional development work the universities undertake is better informed by the needs of the region;
- new teachers are trained to be sensitive to the particular needs of the local schools in which so many of them will take up their careers;

- schools are aware of the need to ensure that the training they offer enables new teachers to be prepared for the particular needs and culture of the school in which they take up their appointment;
- the creation of the Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Association Job Board - OTSA Job Board;
- OTSA and head teachers speaking with the Oxford and Oxford Brookes trainees at the start of their course;
- the creation of the OTSA Get Into Teaching Programme;
- a joint OTSA and University of Oxford Secondary Recruitment Fair;
- the secondment of a dedicated professional to provide advice and support to all Oxfordshire state schools to recruit high calibre teachers and support staff and to encourage prospective employees in the UK and overseas to seek employment in the county. The cost for this two day a week secondment is £30,641 for the first year and £30,930 for Year 2.

3.7 A new project has been launched with the ultimate aim to **reduce rates of persistent absenteeism** in Oxfordshire's schools and academies. It also aims to ensure schools understand the issues and trends of persistent absenteeism both nationally and locally and to share effective strategies that have reduced persistent absenteeism. It is hoped that this project will provide a structure that supports schools to implement strategies and monitor their impact. Findings both during and in conclusion of the project will be communicated in a way that disseminates information so that schools can continue to improve their practice.

3.8 A new two year action research project has been commissioned which responds to the priority to **reduce fixed term and permanent exclusions**. Working with Oxfordshire School Inclusion Team and Mulberry Bush teaching school, two secondary schools will develop strategies and provision for learners with challenging behaviour and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs with the aim of reducing exclusions. The impact of these strategies will then be monitored and evaluated and learning from this process will be used to modify provision for other pupils at risk of exclusion. The findings will be disseminated to all schools and schools will be offered training and resources so that they can adapt the approach to their schools. The cost for this research project is £17,140 for Year 1 and £1,060 for Year 2.

4. Aims for year ahead

4.1 Success from the various commissions detailed above will be monitored. Those organisations commissioned are expected to come to the Board and explain progress in detail on a regular basis. The Board is determined to ensure that there is a positive and measurable impact from this work.

4.2 The Board will continue to strengthen the ground breaking work of the Operational group, checking that recommendations in the OCC quality assurance report are successfully implemented.

4.3 Once the Board's priorities are defined for the coming two years, further work to address them will continue. It is likely that, other than a reduction in number, there may be little change to the focus of the key priorities and that the Board considers a range of strategies to address what are in some cases intransigent problems.

4.4 Improved communication with the school community continues to be a priority. The recent development of the Chairs of Partnership meetings, held by OCC three times a year is proving to be a useful conduit for information sharing between the Board and schools. But there is more to be done and the Board is keen to ensure that its work is understood and supported by all. Plans to consider a membership or subscription to the SSPB are under consideration. In the first instance, this would be at no cost, but would serve as an indication of schools' awareness of the partnership and their support of its aspirations.

5. Current challenges

5.1 The viability and longevity of the Board will depend on the financial model that can be ensured for the future. This is a continuing challenge. The Board initially secured funding through the generous support of OCC and Schools Forum. The Board's budget is now held by the Vale Academy Trust, which is helpful in ensuring that the funds are protected for the work of the Board. The Operational group secures additional funding for specific projects, but there will be continuing pressures to find funds for commissions, and for the small, part time staff who service the Board.

5.2 The changing educational landscape has been a feature of education for many years. But change continues and the proportion of maintained schools converting to academies continues with some pace in Oxfordshire. There are still 160 maintained primary schools in the county and the outcome of the recent consultation could help to shape the developing role of the SSPB. The work of the Board supports all schools, regardless of status, but it will be incumbent on the board to be flexible in its approach for the future as the context continues to change.

5.3 The work to consider alternative structures for the Board for the future will require a significant investment in time and effort and will be dependent on the Board's determination to seek security for its future work.

Rebecca Matthews
Independent Chair, SSPB
September 2017