Somerset’s Strategy for Primary Education

2016 to 2019

Draft for consultation February 2016
This document summarises the collective views of the Primary Writing Team in their co-construction of a Strategy for Primary Education for implementation in Somerset during the 2015-2016 Academic Year. The writing team comprised of Somerset primary and middle school headteachers, and SAPHTO representatives. The strategy draws on a number of key Somerset documents, national research and Ofsted documentation.

Please see 'Somerset's Strategy for Achieving Excellence for All', for the broad education picture, including performance data and our ambitious trajectory for improvement.
1. National Context

The Common Inspection Framework

The New Ofsted Inspection Framework, ‘The Common Inspection Framework’ (CIF), is now in place. One new element relates to the inspection of the curriculum. From September 2015, Ofsted will report on the curriculum under the judgement of leadership and management.

Paragraph 28 of the CIF says that inspectors will evaluate the extent to which leaders, managers and governors:

- Provide learning programmes or a curriculum with suitable breadth, depth and relevance so that they meet any relevant statutory requirements, as well as the needs and interests of children, learners and employers, nationally and in the local community
- Successfully plan and manage learning programmes, the curriculum and careers advice so that all children and learners get a good start and are well-prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment

National Curriculum

In 2014 the government launched a new national curriculum. The aim is to slim down the content of the curriculum in almost all subjects, though not in primary English, maths or science.

The government says the new curriculum does not tell teachers "how to teach", but concentrates on "the essential knowledge and skills every child should have" so that teachers "have the freedom to shape the curriculum to their pupils' needs".

There are changes to the content of all subjects in the national curriculum, including:

- In maths, children will be expected to learn more at an earlier age - for example to know their 12 times table by the age of nine
- In English there will be more importance placed on spelling
- The new computing curriculum will require primary pupils to learn how to write code

The government says the curriculum has a strong focus on basic skills "plus real freedom for teachers to decide how best to teach". It says it wants pupils to leave school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the real world.
2. Local Context

Somerset has 217 Primary Schools, including First Schools (4 - 9yrs), Infant Schools, (4-7yrs), Junior Schools (7-11yrs) and all through Primary Schools. Of these 69 are LA maintained community schools; 41 are academy schools; 64 are Voluntary Controlled (VC); 37 are Voluntary Aided (VA); and one is a Foundation school.

There are 9 Middle Schools which cater for both primary and secondary aged pupils (9 –13 yrs). (5 academy schools; 3 community schools; one VC school)

Somerset also has two ‘all through schools’ taking pupils from reception to Key Stage 4. One is an academy school and one a Free School.

70% of our primary schools are in rural areas and some have fewer than 50 pupils.

In this diverse landscape, Somerset Primary Headteachers have forged a range of partnerships, working together in clusters (e.g. of small schools), and with secondary schools in their local Community Learning Partnerships (CLP). The Somerset Association of Primary Headteachers and Officers (SAPHTO) employs an executive officer, and organises itself through the SAPHTO Executive (nominated serving Headteachers) and SAPHTO delegates (Primary Headteachers in each area).

SAPHTO implemented a Primary Challenge Plan in 2012, which focuses on the common elements of:

- Raising Achievement and Attainment
- Narrowing the Gaps
- Leadership Development.

Central to the plan is System Leadership and the Development of a Self -Improving System through School to School Support. This is offered through an active group of National Leaders and Local Leaders of Education as well as through growing links with Teaching Schools both within and beyond Somerset. To underpin this development, the plan operates at 3 levels:

(i) Strategic - county wide
(ii) Managerial – Learning Partnerships
(iii) Operational – individual schools focused on outcomes for children.

The 2013-2016 Plan aims to support schools to improve their Ofsted grading from ‘Good’ to ‘Outstanding’ and avoid a judgement of ‘Requires Improvement’. Within this there are four major objectives:
1) Improve the Quality of Leadership and Management
2) Improve the Quality of Teaching & Learning
3) Improve the Quality of Early Years
4) Improve the Quality of Transition.

Somerset's primary school profile compares positively to the latest south west and national averages in terms of percentage judged good or outstanding, with almost 90% of Somerset primary aged pupils attending a good or outstanding school. However, most similar local authorities have a greater percentage of good and outstanding schools than Somerset.

At Key Stage 1, the attainment of our 3 to 7 year olds is broadly in line with similar authorities, and outcomes for writing are improving year on year. The gaps between boys' and girls' attainment are beginning to close at KS1, however, the attainment gaps between vulnerable learners and their peers continue to be significant.

At Key Stage 2, the attainment of our 7 to 11 year olds is not improving, and there is a significant gap between Somerset and highest performing similar authorities. Fewer children in Somerset make the expected level of progress between KS1 and KS2 than those nationally, with Somerset ranked 115 placing it in the lowest 25% of all local authorities. [source: local authority interactive tool available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait ]

This situation needs to be turned around rapidly if we are to improve the life chances for all children in Somerset.

This Strategy for Primary, builds on SAPHTO’s work to date and that of the NLEs and LLEs, setting out our priorities for improvement, and what we need to do to ensure every child benefits from a great primary education and is enabled to achieve their full potential.

3. Our Aspiration

We aspire to a world class curriculum, delivered by inspirational teachers; engaging all children and developing their love of learning; supporting them to overcome barriers to learning; and encouraging them to reach for the stars.

Our vision is for Somerset to be a place where children and their families thrive. Based upon secure learning foundations in the Early Years, pupils will be encouraged to learn, achieve and progress at a rate that ensures they are well equipped to lead an independent, economic and socially fulfilling, worthwhile life, no matter what their background.
We have the same expectations for every child and young person to make good progress in their learning, to achieve well and to have the best opportunities for an independent economic and social life as they become young adults.

Every child and young person should go to a good or outstanding Primary school, have access to the best teaching, and benefit from schools, Teaching Schools, and other providers working in partnership with each other to identify and share the best practice as they continue to improve.

We will describe and communicate the new aspirational landscape to all stakeholders and build a more effective structure and accountable education system in Somerset, to ensure that all children’s well-being, potential and achievement is the focus of the aspirations, attitudes and decisions made by all. Our expectation is that all Primary School leaders collaborate with an agreed group moral purpose, which has a determined work ethic. School leaders will embody this way of working, developing their own schools’ ethos, leading the learning and empowering their staff to engage in the new aspirational climate.

Our aspirations and principles are upheld by our new Children and Young People’s Plan:

- Children and Young People have a voice and are listened to
- Outcomes are improved for all children and young people
- Services are person centred
- The impact of inequalities is reduced
- We work together to coproduce services, align our resources, and jointly commission

4. Our Ambition – What we want to improve

We want children in Somerset to reach at least the same level of attainment as those in the highest performing authorities in the South West, and outperform statistical neighbours. We want every child to exceed expected progress from KS1 to KS2 and to narrow the gaps between the lowest attaining children and their peers nationally. In particular, we want to improve outcomes for boys and for children with SEND and SEN support, children looked after by the Local Authority, and those entitled to Free School Meals. To do this we must develop ways to ensure that:
• All Primary School headteachers and governing bodies have a detailed understanding of their school’s performance, including that of vulnerable groups, and how this compares to similar schools in Somerset and nationally, so that they know precisely what they need to improve.
• All Primary School leaders engage in effective and accountable partnerships that take collective responsibility for children in the partnership and target support where it is most needed.
• Children’s needs are identified early, assessed appropriately, and supported effectively to remove barriers to learning.
• Teachers have access to high quality training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), learning from current, evidence based, best practice.
• Primary leaders and teachers welcome, engage in and benefit from effective peer support and challenge.
• There is greater recognition of the different types of settings and range of skills within the Primary sector.
• Primary Schools work closely with Early Years settings, Secondary schools and parents to ensure smooth transitions, and parents have a greater understanding of how they can support their child’s learning.

Collaborating more effectively will enable Somerset to achieve the best possible outcomes for children by providing:

• A secure foundation for children which helps them to develop as a lifelong learner, well equipped to achieve their full potential
• Learning experiences which recognise and foster the characteristics of effective learning and enthuse, engage and motivate children to learn
• Engagement with other agencies and all parents and carers, particularly those who are hard to reach.
• Equality of opportunity which recognises and values the individuality of the unique child and encourages high aspirations.
• Consistently high quality schools with a shared understanding of what is meant by ‘a great education’ for all learners.
5. Our Key Priorities

Priority 1. Improvement in the Quality of Teaching and Learning

‘Great teaching is defined as that which leads to improved progress of the whole child’.

The Teachers Standards (revised 2013) set out the expectations of all teachers. Teachers should:

- Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
- Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
- Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
- Plan and teach well-structured lessons
- Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils
- Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment
- Fulfil wider professional responsibilities, including:
  - developing effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support
  - deploying support staff effectively
  - taking responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues
  - communicating effectively with parents with regard to pupils’ achievements and well-being.

Our priority is to ensure every teacher in Somerset is empowered to meet these standards and continually improve their teaching.

What we need to do:

- Produce a comprehensive teaching and learning toolkit that outlines a menu of:
  - Available options: structures/models/clusters
  - Support for the full and wider teaching workforce e.g. Teaching Assistants.
  - Promotion and sharing of effective case studies
  - Effective early help ideas and sources
  - Where appropriate, enables risks and research to be undertaken
  - Signposts where the opportunities for teachers to work/communicate beyond their own classroom and school are
- Ensure that all CPD is needs led through an audit of need: skills, knowledge, pedagogy and confidence. Quality assure and evaluate CPD and respond to findings.
- Enhance professional teaching through regular pedagogical dialogue, shared good practice and effective CPD.
- Recruit high quality staff into Somerset at all stages of their career pathways with an effective county wide systematic CPD leadership plan - growing the workforce
- Set challenging and aspirational progress and attainment targets for all vulnerable/disadvantaged groups: EY phonics, KS1 and KS2 – all areas
- Ensure everything teachers and TAs do, links back to learning with proven tracked evidence.
- Share and research effective programmes/support for developing pupil resilience, encourage ‘risk taking’, and allow children to learn from their mistakes.
- Identify and support parents and carers with literacy and numeracy needs and develop programmes that enable them to better support their children’s learning.
- Support parents of children with English as a second language, to improve their English language skills where needed, to enable them to better support their children’s learning.
- Improve transition points

**Priority 2. The Development of Leadership and Management (including governance, middle leaders & aspiring leaders)**

Somerset expects all leaders to develop and continually reflect on their own practice to ensure that they, their pupils and staff achieve their potential through:

- Building on what they do well
- Promoting and sustaining well being
- Supporting and developing according to school and individual needs
- Sharing good practice: locally, nationally and internationally
- Understanding and advocating professional responsibility
- Implementing and supporting partnerships that ‘draw’ others in
- Developing capacity: support schools and leaders to ‘grow their own’ and unlock potential
- Seeking out and contributing to the local partnerships.

**What We Need to Do**

- All leaders must account for all pupil and staff well-being, and for all attainment and achievement outcomes, identifying and acting on any shortfalls.
• Ensure that the principles of good/outstanding continuing professional development (CPD) and school to school support are clearly documented, have proven evidence of positive impact on pupils’ learning; and are shared and understood by all who participate.
• Ensure the key features of the leadership improvement journey (monitoring, challenge and support), are documented, and evidence of different approaches/options are shared and discussed.
• Ensure there is a County wide leadership programme that is coherent, developmental, and linked to a menu of planned and managed programmes to meet overall and bespoke leadership needs.
• Start a leadership programme from NQT’s onwards to create a culture of drive and aspiration to leadership
• Develop a shared view of what needs to be in place for leadership to move from a category e.g. ‘Requires Improvement’ to ‘Good’, and ‘Good’ to ‘Outstanding’. Share case studies and learning from improving RI schools; some of the most effective drivers, practice and outcomes can come from these leaders.
• Ensure that leaders are clear who they can go to for help.
• Ensure that all leaders who are encouraged/asked to be role models/coaches are themselves provided with the necessary CPD and skills (including data analysis) to: support, coach and train others.
• Ensure that there is agreed and documented clarity on everyone’s role and responsibility with agreed time lines and that the cultural principles of asking for support/help are agreed and shared before any support/help starts. e.g. confidentiality and trust etc.
• Somerset to produce an up to date and forward looking (paper and online) teacher and leadership recruitment package.

Priority 3. The development of the self-improving education system

There is an apparent dichotomy between schools being expected to be autonomous, at the same time as being a partner in a wider school system. Improving the attainment of all primary pupils is dependent on trust and collaboration in effective and accountable partnerships, between schools of all phases and with the local authority.

What we need to do:

• Ensure all schools understand their place in this partnership and develop the trusting relationships with each other and the LA which would ensure that they welcome the peer support and challenge necessary for system-wide improvement.
• Ensure arrangements across Community Learning Partnerships (CLPs), federations and other informal collaborative partnerships between schools, such as the SAPHTO Primary Challenge Plan, step up to the next level of system-wide joint accountability, including data sharing protocols and a willingness of peers to give and to receive critical evaluation of practice and outcomes.

• Develop joint targets for improvement attached to the future allocation of funding to CLPs and other groups, to sharpen the focus on the aspects of practice that will have the greatest impact on outcomes.

• Develop a model for schools to peer-challenge practice in relation to the application of mainstream core standards, or types of interventions being made for pupils with SEND and other under achieving groups, in order to jointly improve the progress made by these pupils in each of the schools in the collaboration.

Priority 4. The Development of Effective Quality Assurance Mechanisms at School and Local Authority Level

We must ensure that the needs of our most vulnerable children are identified as early as possible and are effectively met. We must also ensure that the LA knows its schools and provides them with good quality performance information, and uses this to determine support and challenge.

What we need to do:

• Improve the range and quality of data shared with schools and governing bodies. This must include, bench mark data; trends; all vulnerable and underachieving groups; targets and challenge data.
• Establish a data sharing protocol across schools.
• Agree and share common performance indicators
• Undertake a Partnerships audit to evaluate impact, and establish a core purpose, transparent funding, terms of reference and accountability.
• Establish mechanisms to hold schools to account for pupil premium, notional and high needs funding: spend, impact, shared good practice.
6. The Local Authority Role

The Government has set out a strategic role for LAs, which includes:

- Promoting a supply of good quality school places
- Ensuring fair access to education for each child
- Monitoring, challenging, and intervening where necessary in LA maintained schools, where children, when compared to their peers nationally, underperform and where the quality of education is not good enough.
- Reporting concerns about Academies to the Regional Schools commissioner
- Ensuring provision for children with special education needs.

Somerset’s Improving Outcomes Strategy was implemented in schools in January 2016 and sets out how Somerset County Council will fulfil its statutory responsibilities and, where necessary, exercise its intervention powers to promote high standards, ensure fair access to opportunity for education and training and promote the fulfilment of learning potential for every child and young person in Somerset.

A cadre of Somerset Education Partners (SEP) is being recruited to provide a support and challenge function to individual schools, meaning that the infrastructure will exist for the local authority to understand its schools and the provision made for vulnerable learners.

The LA also needs to act as the ‘middle layer’ or mediating layer building and actively facilitating a culture of collaboration and professional expertise and steering the vision for education within the community of schools.