

Darlington Education Strategy Group Terms of Reference 2023-24

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Education Strategy Group (ESG) is to provide overall strategic direction to educational partnership activity across Darlington, working with the Primary Headteachers Forum, the 11-19 Partnership, Vulnerable Pupil Panel and other partnership groups. It will provide overall strategic direction for identified partnership work programmes and funded projects.

The ESG will promote high standards and inclusive practice to support educational progress and outcomes for all, including the most vulnerable children, children with special educational needs and disabilities and support the local authority's corporate parent responsibility.

The ESG will respond to and seek to influence national policy and share local and national best practice with partners and pursue opportunities to work together to develop practice in Darlington.

The ESG will seek to influence relevant wider local authority and community issues and provide input from an education perspective as appropriate, for example input to the Children and Young People's Plan and the Public Health Board.

2. Local context

The Education Strategy Group was established in response to:

- the changing role of the local authority
- a national emphasis on school-led improvement and development of system leadership within schools
- identifying potential funding opportunities

Consultation with schools, academies, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and post-16 providers has shown that there continues to be a strong appetite locally to further develop local collective arrangements, led by schools and colleges, which provide a vehicle through which education providers and wider stakeholders can take forward well-founded joint projects and ensure that system resources can be effectively deployed across Darlington.

There is also a desire to maintain and build on historic strong relationships between schools and post 16 providers and between schools and post 16 providers and the local authority.

Furthermore, there is a developing consensus around a number of key priority areas where collective action could add value, over and above the efforts of individual schools, academies, colleges and MATs.

3. Scope

The Education Strategy Group will consider all matters relating to the provision of education in Darlington in three broad policy areas:

(a) School Organisation and Admissions – securing the supply of sufficient school places, including nursery to 19 provision in an increasingly autonomous context with a range of providers, and ensuring fair access for admission to school.

(b) Education Excellence - supporting the role of the local authority to promote high standards in education and tackling underperformance through the sharing of best practice, collaborative projects including the development of transition programmes at key transition points, school improvement and intervention.

(c) Inclusion – supporting the local authority to ensure that High Needs Funding is deployed effectively to support inclusion and providing strategic oversight of provision for vulnerable children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, exclusions and alternative provision, children missing education in the context of the changes to local authority central services and changes to admission arrangements.

4. Membership

The membership of the strategy group is as follows:

- Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion, Darlington Borough Council (chair)
- Chair of the 11 – 19 Partnership
- Chair of the Primary Headteachers Forum
- Chair of the Schools Forum
- Post-16 representative
- Secondary school representative
- Primary school representative
- Special schools representative
- Chair of the Vulnerable Pupil Panel (VPP)
- Head of the Virtual School

All members agree to ensure they have a nominated deputy who can attend meetings on their behalf if they are unable to.

The group will invite representatives from the Department for Education and other agencies to meetings as required.

5. Ways of working, frequency of meetings and secretariat

The group will meet half-termly and more frequently as and when the need arises. The quorum shall be 60% of the group present.

Minutes of the meetings of the Strategy Group will be circulated to all members as soon as available and formally agreed at the next meeting of the Strategy Group prior to circulation to headteachers and principals of all schools and colleges and Trust CEOs. The agenda and supporting papers will be sent out at least one week in advance of each meeting.

The local authority will co-ordinate and administer the meetings, unless alternative arrangements are agreed by the group. The local authority will also provide dedicated support in terms of data analysis, administrative support and senior officer time to facilitate and contribute to the work of the Strategy Group.