

School Sixth Form provision – Guiding Principles

The government has raised the participation age (RPA)¹ so that all young people in England are now required to continue in education and training until at least 18, which could be through:

- full time study in a school or college or with a training provider
- full time work or volunteering (20 hours or more) combined with part-time education or training; or
- an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Local Authorities have duties to ‘encourage, enable and assist’ young people in being able to participate. One of these duties involves the need to:

‘secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-19 and those up to 25 with a learning difficulty assessment or Education, Health and Care plan in their area’. To fulfil this, Local Authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision’.²

Within Birmingham, there are currently 70 schools with sixth forms³. This includes:

- 33 academies (mainstream)
- 3 academy special schools
- 17 local authority maintained schools (mainstream)
- 10 local authority maintained special schools
- 4 free schools
- 3 academies and UTCs for learners aged 14-19

The numbers of schools with sixth forms in the Birmingham City area has increased over the last three years and the number of Birmingham residents attending school sixth forms has increased from 8,000 in 2012/13 academic year to 9,345 in the 2014/15 academic year⁴. The size of school sixth forms vary in both size and quality.

Birmingham City Council’s vision is for all residents to:-

“live in a World-Class City-region, where everyone has the opportunity to access high quality education and training leading to sustainable employment and lead a healthy, meaningful and prosperous life.”

¹ Section 10 Education and Skills Act 2008

² Sections 15ZA and 18A of the Education Act 1996 (as inserted by the Apprenticeships, Skills and Children and Learning Act 2009) and Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014

³ Source: Edubase, as of January 2016 based on the legal school designation. A small number of schools do not have learners on roll but have the legal designation. According to the School Census, 2015/16 there are 55 mainstream School Sixth Forms and 14-19 Academies with learners on roll and 14 Special School Sixth forms with learners on roll. To date, there are a further five new School Sixth Forms approved to open over the coming years.

⁴ Source: Education Funding Agency Local Authority Post 16 Pivot Tables

The Birmingham and Solihull Post 16 Area Based Review (ABR) is a once in a generation opportunity for all partners and stakeholders involved in 14-19, adult education and training to drive forward the Council's vision through the transformation of the education and skills system in our sub-region. We will work closely with School and College leaders and the Regional Schools Commissioner to develop the best local 14-19 education system which meets the needs of all young people.

Guiding principles

Nationally, a number of papers have been written about post 16 provision and how to promote the best interest of the learner; the guiding principles outlined below, reflects the recorded good practice.

1. Quality

School sixth form provision available to learners should be delivered to a high standard of teaching, learning and assessment, thereby resulting in successful outcomes;

School sixth forms should promote:

- high quality learner outcomes, as well as retention, progress and skills development,
- a broad range of study programmes that builds on prior learning, meets the needs of 16-19 provision and prepares learners well for progression into future employment
- effective monitoring of performance with appropriate and consistent interventions to reduce achievement gaps between groups
- Robust safeguarding arrangements particularly for vulnerable young people

2. Choice

The choice of study programmes available to learners should be broad and balanced, thereby enabling learners to study an appropriate combination of subjects which gives them access to university, apprenticeships or higher level employment.

School sixth forms should provide:

- a range of appropriate qualifications from which students can choose and gain accreditation, including the study of English and maths as required
- opportunities and experiences of work and industry
- a curriculum offer informed by the needs of the local economy and future skills needs
- access to a range of opportunities for developing wellbeing, resilience and personal growth to enable preparation for adulthood. This may include volunteering, enterprise activities and role-modelling for younger pupils.

Learners should have:-

- choice and access to high quality post 16 providers, appropriate to their needs regardless of where they live.
- access to independent and impartial information, advice and guidance to help them make an informed choice of course, provider and career pathway.

3. Progression

School sixth form study programmes should incorporate learning components which promote personal development and preparation for appropriate and sustained progression.

School sixth forms should promote:-

- Clear progression routes to higher education, employment and further training
- effective tracking of learner progress at all stages of learning
- individualised support for those learners at risk of disengagement from education and training
- securing and tracking of the destinations of all young people into higher education, employment and apprenticeships.

Learners should have access to:-

- employers who can inform learners about the range of roles and opportunities available and help them understand how to make this a reality,
- Independent advice, guidance and support if they become at risk of disengagement from the sixth form provision and support with transition

4. Viability

Sixth form class sizes should be sufficient to promote interactive and collaborative learning and should be financially viable, thereby demonstrating good value for money.

School sixth forms should provide:-

- effective financial management of their sixth form budget, which shouldn't be underwritten by the 11-16 provision,
- a sixth form review if the learner numbers are less than 150, to determine sustainability based on quality, range of provision and financial viability.
- at least 'good' provision as identified in the Ofsted inspection framework.

Background papers*

1. Ofsted - School Inspection handbook from September 2015
2. NFER - Sixth Form Options
3. National Audit Office - Getting value for money from the education of 16 to 18 year olds
4. DfE - Careers guidance and inspiration in schools. (March 2015)
5. HMGovernment - Reviewing post 16 education and training institutions: guidance on area reviews (2015)
6. DfE - Participation of young people in education, employment or training. (Sept 2014)