

DECISION REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER TEMPLATE

From: Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To: Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Subject: Raising Ambition. Enabling Curiosity. Building Resilience.
A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent, 2025-2030

Decision no: 25/0023

Key Decision : Yes.

- It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions.

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee - 27 February 2025

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All divisions

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary:

This report introduces *Raising Ambition. Enabling Curiosity. Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent, 2025 to 2030*, which provides a high-level statement of intent to guide KCC and our partners in delivering education over the next five years.

It sets out our mission, principles and priorities for work, in line with KCC's statutory duties and supports KCC to respond to the national agenda for education.

The scope of the strategy is education from early years to post-16.

The strategy touches on most aspects of education with a focus on developing system cohesion and strategic leadership, educational excellence via school improvement, improved outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, safeguarding, SEND and inclusion, attendance, mental and general health, the work of the virtual school, fair access, as well as other relevant strands of work such as culture and the impact of AI and net zero on education.

This report additionally provides the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee with the findings of a public consultation on the content of the strategy. This report details the consultation responses and recommends the Education Strategy be adopted.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member consider the following proposal:

(a) ADOPT the draft Education Strategy “Raising Ambition, Enabling Curiosity, Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent 2025-2030”;

(b) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to make non-substantial revisions as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy where changes do not require additional governance; and

(c) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the objectives of the strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report introduces *Raising Ambition. Enabling Curiosity. Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent, 2025-2030*, which provides a high-level statement of intent to guide KCC and its partners in delivering education over the next five years.

1.2 This strategy has been developed in response to the previous and current Government’s approach to a self-improving, school led system. As the system evolves there is a growing understanding of the need for sector-wide collaboration to ensure that every child receives an excellent education.

1.3 The audiences for the strategy are Members and Officers with responsibility for education, professionals who lead and work in education, parents and carers, Kent residents and children and young people in state-funded education.

1.4 The strategy has been co-produced and is based on a wide range of stakeholder engagement work with educational professionals, partners, parents, carers and children and young people. This has been undertaken with both internal and external partner and stakeholder input to understand the issues within the sector, to inform the structure, identify the areas of focus and refine the content of the strategy.

1.5 The strategy includes a mission statement, a set of principles and three areas of focus as well as a high level summary of the activity under each of the three areas of focus.

1.6 Implementation of this strategy will:

- Provide a vision for education and an approach to support KCC to deliver its statutory duties in education
- Align to the national direction of travel, within a rapidly changing context
- Address specific challenges and issues within the system
- Support sector cohesion and collaboration

1.7 A public consultation was undertaken between 23 October 2024 and 15 December 2024 on the approach and the content of the strategy. This report provides details of the consultation outcomes and considers that feedback and its contribution to the final version of the strategy.

2. Key Considerations

2.1 The previous overarching strategy for education was Vision and Priorities for Improvement, 2018-2021. This draft strategy is new and aims to provide a collaboratively developed vision and approach to support KCC and the sector to fulfil statutory duties as it strives to deliver educational excellence. KCC does not have a current strategy for education.

2.2 The Local Authority's role in state-funded education has undergone significant change over previous years and is set to change further as the new Government develops and embeds its own education agenda. The draft strategy aims to outline principles and approaches to support delivery during a period of change.

2.3 There is a range of statutory guidance underpinning the work of the County Council and educational settings, schools, colleges and providers. The key documents outlining this are:

2.3.1 Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services, April 2013. This sets out the key areas of responsibility for educational excellence and a high level summary of responsibilities for state funded schools including for academies.

2.3.2 The Education Act, 2002, which sets out requirements around safeguarding, the structure of education, i.e. the role of academies and the curriculum, specifically to provide 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils/students at school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'.

2.4 The way these requirements are met can vary and at the time of drafting the new Government has launched an independent, expert-led '*Curriculum and Assessment Review*', which will provide an opportunity for leaders to broker an agreement about how schools can better equip our children and young people for adult life.

2.5 The Children's Wellbeing and Education Bill was introduced to Parliament in December 2024 and had its second reading on 8 January 2025. The Bill, once adopted, will mean further changes for the Local Authority and the education sector.

- 2.6 The Government's Devolution White Paper December 2024 also presents a changing backdrop to the delivery of the strategy.
- 2.7 Within this landscape, the strategy aims to be agile and responsive, setting out a clear vision and an immutable set of principles to guide the way KCC and the sector fulfil their evolving duties in education. It aims to support our decision making and the work of the sector through a time of change.
- 2.8 An implementation delivery plan will underpin the activity set out under the three areas of focus within the proposed strategy. This will support the detailed delivery of the work to respond to the anticipated or possible change brought about by listed national and local activity above.
- 2.9 KCC faces specific local concerns. In response to these, the strategy builds on and links to a range of other strategic pieces of work or reviews that are taking place, including and notably:
- 2.9.1 Improving the system approach to SEND inclusion. Two inspections (2019 and 2022) identified significant areas of weakness within the SEND area (Health, Education and Care Services) and the need for a more consistent approach to SEND inclusion across all education providers. The proposed education strategy sits alongside the response with the newly refreshed SEND strategy, the County-wide Approach to Inclusive Education (CATIE), Special Schools Review and the Education Accessibility Strategy.
 - 2.9.2 Funding Services to Schools, 2025, which responds to the changes in national arrangements for funding schools and local authorities.
 - 2.9.3 A review of Early Years Education in Kent – supporting settings to embed inclusive practice, 2024 which will help early years settings to embed inclusive support for children and builds on existing good practice.
- 2.10 The strategy will support and enhance the strategic priorities set out in "Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026." By supporting children and young people to fulfil their academic potential, the strategy contributes to the broader goals of creating a prosperous, healthy, and inclusive Kent, the long-term vision for the county's future.
- 2.11 The strategy will support and enhance the strategic priorities set out in "Securing Kent's Future" by supporting KCC and the sector to adapt to the changes in government funding, such as the removal of the school improvement grant. This specifically links to the work on Services to Schools but also links to the national agenda around school-to-school support (this term references all parts of the sector from early years to post-16 providers) and system leadership.

3. Background

Development of the proposed Strategy

- 3.1 KCC is committed to supporting the best educational opportunities for our children and young people. Furthermore, as a Local Authority we have defined statutory duties related to education which we have to deliver related to promoting an excellent education for all children and young people.
- 3.2 The development of the draft *A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent: Raising ambition. Enabling curiosity. Building resilience, 2025-2030*, builds on existing work and good practice and addresses both longstanding and emerging issues within the education system. It has been developed based on a range of stakeholder engagement activity with educational professionals, parents, carers and children and young people.

The engagement activity underpinning the proposed strategy

- 3.3 Substantial stakeholder engagement work took place prior to drafting the proposed strategy, which provided valuable insights and feedback that fundamentally shaped the proposed strategy. The following stakeholder activity took place:
- Six engagement sessions with a total of 118 children and young people.
 - Six focus groups with parents and carers.
 - Six co-construction sessions. These took place with sector leaders and professionals from early years, schools and post-16 providers.
 - 16 co-construction conversations with representatives from external partner organisations and key provider associations such as Kent Association of Leaders in Education.
 - Extensive internal and cross-directorate discussions.

The content and structure of the strategy

- 3.4 The strategy includes a mission statement, a set of principles and three key areas of focus under which sits further detail about the work to be undertaken.
- 3.5 **The Kent education mission is to:**
- Collaboratively develop and support an effective, evidence-informed system of strong leaders and staff grounded in clear moral purpose to respond to the local needs and aspirations of Kent children, parents and carers.
 - Place children and young people at the centre of all education, by ensuring they are heard, included and supported to be ambitious, curious and resilient individuals who are well prepared for their future and empowered to achieve.
- 3.6 The strategy has **8 underlying principles** – these are to be:
- Ambitious – striving for the best learning and educational outcomes for all children and young people.
 - Inclusive and child-centred – promoting safe, relationship-based working to ensure an understanding of individual needs, joined up services, smooth transitions and equity.

- Sector-focused – enhancing sector-based leadership, expertise, and skills for effective, continuous improvement.
- Collaborative and place-based – facilitating collaborative, place-based approaches to education and childcare, meeting local needs through building strong support networks and partnerships.
- Evidence-informed – being learning and development focused, recognising evidence, and seeking best practice to inform continuous improvement.
- Sustainable – building for a financially stable and appropriately resourced future.
- Compassionate and principled – seeking to balance best interests whilst providing appropriate challenge and making difficult decisions.
- Open and consistent – communicating effectively and consistently to build trust and stronger relationships.

3.7 The core content of the draft strategy is organised into the three areas of focus

- **Raising ambition**
- **Enabling curiosity**
- **Building resilience**

Each area of focus has a number of priorities and objectives which provide some high level detail of the work that will be undertaken.

A summary of consultation and responses

3.8 A public consultation was undertaken between 23 October 2024 and 15 December 2024 on the content and format of the strategy.

3.9 There were 3,360 visits to the strategy consultation, and documentation was downloaded over 1,830 times resulting in 131 responses. This is in the context of a range of other education consultations taking place prior to or overlapping with this work. It also needs to be considered in light of the wider engagement work already mentioned. (Paragraph 3.3).

3.10 The respondents largely fall into two broad categories: Educational professionals (54%), and parents, carers and residents (46%). Of those who identified as parents and carers, there were 40 parents with children and young people currently in education, 16 of these identified as SEND and 9 had an EHCP. The demographic analysis indicates that there was no significant demographic difference in the consultation response.

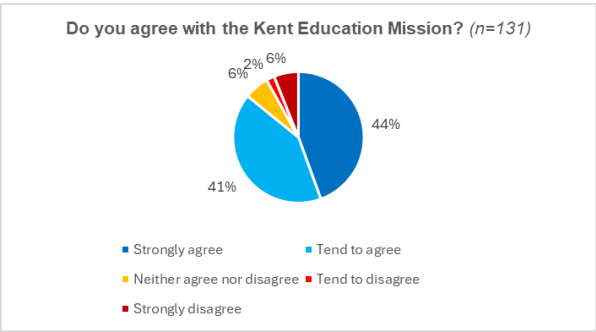
3.11 The overwhelming response to the proposed strategy was very positive with 80% or more of respondents strongly or tending to agree with all parts of the strategy. This rose to 99% for some sections.

The consultation responses to the strategy

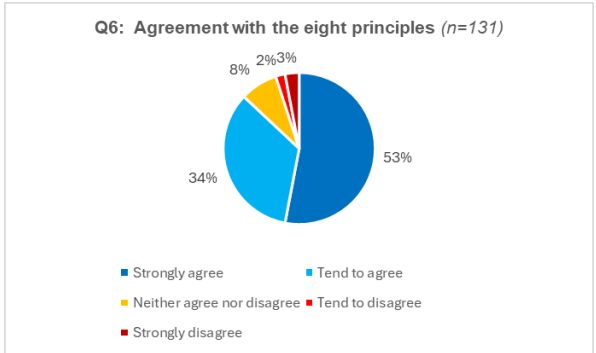
3.12 The consultation questionnaire contained both closed and open questions. The following provides a summary of the response to each main question, including the percentages and an indication of the comments made.

3.13 *Was the document easy to read?* Of the 131 responses, 87% found the documents easy to understand, 11% found them partially easy, 2% did not find them easy to read.

3.14 *To what extent do you agree with the Education Mission?* The vast majority of respondents, 85%, agreed with the mission. Comments were raised around the perceived lack of specificity and how will it be achieved. Some questioned if children were central enough and the question of resourcing – both staffing and finances were raised here.

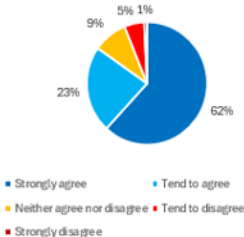


3.15 *To what extent do you agree with the principles?* Again the vast majority 87%, of respondents were positive about the principles. The comments made questioned if ambition meant progress or just attainment. There was discussion about the challenge of being inclusive of SEND in mainstream education. Resourcing was mentioned as was the challenges presented by the Kent context. Some expressed the view that eight were perhaps too many.

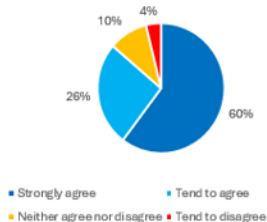


3.16 *To what extent do you agree with the three areas of focus: Raising Ambition, Enabling Curiosity and Building resilience?* Strong support was demonstrated for each Area of Focus, with very few disagreeing (between 5 and 8 respondents only) and a greater proportion of respondents strongly agreeing (rather than tending to agree) when compared to the responses to other questions. The commentary again raised the need to recognise progress, not just overall attainment, particularly for those with SEND. Comments were made about the importance of developing creativity yet the challenges posed by the national curriculum and its perceived narrowness. Resourcing, the Kent context and ensuring that early years was appropriately recognised across all areas were points also raised.

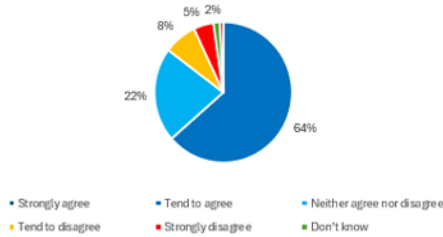
Q7: Focus of the Strategy - Raising Ambition (n=131)



Q7: Focus of the Strategy - Enabling Curiosity (n=131)



Q7: Focus of the Strategy - Building Resilience (n=129)



3.17 *To what extent do you agree with the priorities and objectives outlined under Raising Ambition?* Comments were made about the Ofsted framework and the limited insights inspection outcomes provide about the quality of education. The challenge of SEND inclusion was also mentioned. Comments were also made questioning the resourcing (both in terms of the financial but also in terms of the staffing expertise) needed and the detail of how this would be delivered. The tables below outline the levels of agreement against each priority.

Q8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following 6 goals/priorities are the right ones to support <i>Raising Ambition</i>						
	High standards	Strong starting points	Good pathways	Great schools, strong Ofsted	Meeting specific needs	Equality of opportunity
Strongly agree	82 (63%)	92 (70%)	99 (76%)	62 (48%)	97 (74%)	99 (76%)
Tend to agree	40 (31%)	32 (24%)	26 (20%)	41 (32%)	21 (16%)	24 (18%)
<i>Total 'agree'</i>	94%	94%	96%	80%	90%	94%
Neither agree nor disagree	4 (3%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	16 (12%)	7 (5%)	7 (5%)
Tend to disagree	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	8 (6%)	3 (2%)	0
Strongly disagree	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	3 (2%)	0
<i>Total 'disagree'</i>	4%	3%	3%	8%	4%	0%

Q9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following 5 goals/priorities are the right ones to support <i>Enabling Curiosity</i>					
	Effective pastoral care	Great teaching and learning	Good health	Good physical fitness	Creativity
Strongly agree	90 (69%)	105 (81%)	84 (65%)	82 (64%)	100 (76%)
Tend to agree	34 (26%)	23 (18%)	38 (29%)	34 (26%)	28 (21%)
<i>Total 'agree'</i>	95%	99%	94%	90%	97%
Neither agree nor disagree	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	6 (5%)	11 (9%)	2 (2%)
Tend to disagree	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	
Strongly disagree	1 (1%)				1 (1%)
<i>Total 'disagree'</i>	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following 5 goals/priorities are the right ones to support <i>Building Resilience</i>					
	Safe-guarding	Mental Health	System wide cohesion	School to school improvement	Future-proofing
Strongly agree	112 (87%)	101 (78%)	84 (65%)	79 (61%)	78 (61%)
Tend to agree	14 (11%)	19 (15%)	33 (25%)	32 (25%)	32 (25%)
<i>Total 'agree'</i>	98%	93%	90%	86%	86%
Neither agree nor disagree	2 (2%)	6 (5%)	10 (8%)	13 (10%)	14 (11%)
Tend to disagree		1 (1%)		2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Strongly disagree	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
<i>Total 'disagree'</i>	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Consultation feedback themes and response

3.18 There is broad support for the proposed strategy and strong agreement with the content. Any changes to the strategy will need to be carefully considered as there is no groundswell of opinion for change.

3.19 There are however, four main themes that come from the analysis of the qualitative feedback:

- Implementation, specifically, how will the strategy be delivered? This included questions about resourcing, the impact on staff, roles and responsibilities, monitoring and sustainability. This included mention of the Kent specific context and perceived challenges.
- The documentation and ensuring clarity.

- The curriculum and how the abilities, skills and interests of those who are less academic will be supported and focused on, particularly in relation to having needs met.
- The challenges of SEND inclusion in mainstream. This came from education professionals and the parents of children with, as well as those without, any SEND

3.20 In response to the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the consultation, the key content in the proposed strategy has not been changed. However, further details and clarification about the implementation of the strategy have been added and we have improved the consistency of language in the document to support clarity and ease of engagement. Regarding the other two themes, both the wider curriculum and the inclusion of SEND children are currently considered and covered in the strategy. Other small changes have been made in response to other comments, partly around language and partly around inclusion.

3.21 The full externally produced consultation report is attached as Appendix 1.

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

4.1 The option of doing nothing and continuing without a strategy that reflects the current operating environment, as well as how the present and future challenges could be addressed by KCC and the stakeholder community, was dismissed.

4.2 KCC has a wide range of statutory duties it needs to meet in education. These are a priority, and we need to consider and plan for how these are fulfilled. The proposed strategy supports KCC to fulfil its responsibilities and promote educational excellence for all children and young people. This includes being ambitious in tackling underperformance, ensuring a sufficient supply of good education places, including in early education and childcare, and sufficient local provision for pupils with special educational needs.

4.3 The vision and detail in the proposed strategy will support meeting the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act (2014), which outlines a broader responsibility to:

- Champion the needs of vulnerable children and young people, their families and carers, so there is an inclusive learning system which gives them the opportunity to succeed.
- A responsibility to ensure a strategic coherence that enables schools and settings to develop purposeful partnerships that improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes for children and young people.
- Collaborate with partners to build the capacity for sector-led school improvement.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The draft Education Strategy provides a vision for how the County Council delivers existing and anticipated activity and services intended to support education.

- 5.2 The work to be delivered in the proposed strategy is cost neutral and will be delivered in line with existing and anticipated funding arrangements. Operational delivery arising from this proposed strategy for future years will be determined by the approved budget and the Medium Term and Financial Plan (MTFP) requirements. It also aligns with the work undertaken by the review of the Services to Schools.
- 5.3 The strategy will support and enhance the strategic priorities set out in “Securing Kent’s Future” by supporting KCC and the sector to adapt to the changes in government funding, such as the recent removal of the school improvement grant. This specifically links to the work on Services to Schools but also links to the national agenda around school-to-school support (this term references all parts of the sector from early years to post-16 providers) and system leadership.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The strategy will support KCC to deliver against key legislation, including the Education Act 2002, the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice 2015, and Equality Act 2010, ensuring compliance with statutory duties.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 Prior to consultation, an EqIA was completed. As one of the underlying principles to the strategy is to be inclusive and child-centred, the EQIA identifies no specific negative impacts for particular protected characteristics. The draft strategy intends to improve outcomes for all and improve equality of opportunity. No adverse impact on protected groups was identified prior to stakeholder consultation.
- 7.2 The consultation report did not identify any negative impact on any protected characteristic.
- 7.3 The consultation sought feedback on the initial EqIA but only a few comments were made. These were largely queries around SEND provision and how the strategy would specifically address this. However, the low level of response to this question, combined with the demographic profile of the respondents, (there was no demographic bias) mean that in practice the consultation alone has not highlighted any clear and specific areas in relation to or from those with protected characteristics that require addressing.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 The strategy does not have additional data protection implications. All data used in support of implementing the strategy will be used in line with GDPR requirements and KCC’s current and relevant GDPR privacy notices.

9. Other Corporate Implications

- 9.1 The decision to adopt this proposed strategy will support all education work, specifically the work on SEND, the work on Services to Schools and the work on Accessibility.
- 9.2 The proposed Education Strategy will support Framing Kent's Future, to deliver Priority 1: Levelling up Kent, specifically the work to:
- 9.2.1 Work with partners to develop a skills system for Kent that delivers skills that are resilient to changing workforce needs and opportunities and supports people to higher level skills.
 - 9.2.2 Maintain KCC's strategic role in supporting schools in Kent to deliver accessible, high quality education provision for all families.
 - 9.2.3 See significant improvements in the economy, connectivity, educational attainment, skills and employment rates and public health outcomes in deprived communities in coastal areas so that they improve faster than the rest of Kent to reduce the gaps.

10. Governance

- 10.1 The Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education will be delegated authority in line with the final decision. In turn the Director of Education and SEN will be delegated authority to implement the decision, in line with existing schemes of delegation.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 *Raising Ambition. Enabling Curiosity. Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent, 2025-2030*, is a comprehensive and ambitious strategy facilitating sector cohesion, collaboration and improvement for all children from early years through to post-16.
- 11.2 Successful implementation of the strategy will require the collective effort of all stakeholders, regular monitoring review and amendment to reflect the changing context and a fundamental commitment to ongoing improvement.
- 11.3 The approval and endorsement of this strategy is the first step towards ensuring an excellent education for all children and young people in Kent.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member consider the following proposal:

(a) ADOPT the draft Education Strategy "Raising Ambition, Enabling Curiosity, Building Resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent 2025-2030";

(b) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to make non-substantial revisions as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy where changes do not require additional governance; and

(c) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the objectives of the strategy.

12. Background Documents

- Equality Impact Assessment
- Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services

13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Consultation Report
Appendix 2: Draft Revised Strategy

14. Contact details

Report Author: Michelle Stanley	Director: Christine McInnes
Job title: Education Lead Adviser	Job title: Director Education and SEN
Telephone number: 03000 417440	Telephone number: 03000 418913
Email address: michelle.stanley@kent.gov.uk	Email address: Christine.mcinnnes@kent.gov.uk