

2 Rivergate
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6EH

T: 0300 123 1231
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

Direct T: 0300 013 1368
E: Bradley.Simmons@ofsted.gov.uk



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Bradley Simmons HMI
Regional Director, South West

John Gilbert, The Chief Executive, Swindon Borough Council
Cllr David Renard, Leader, Swindon Council
Cllr Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Karen Reeve, Director of Children's Services, Swindon
All headteachers, Swindon
All chairs of governors, Swindon,
Rebecca Clark, Regional Schools Commissioner, South West
Chief executives of multi-academy trusts, Swindon
Justin Tomlinson MP, North Swindon
Robert Buckland MP, South Swindon

Dear colleagues

School performance in Swindon

Following the inspection of Swindon Borough Council's arrangements for supporting school improvement and my letter to the leader of the council, I am writing to share my deepening concern over the poor performance of Swindon's schools.

I have raised such issues in writing with the council on at least three occasions in the past. At times, the council has been, frankly, defensive in its response.

I am, therefore, widening the audience of this letter so that no key player in Swindon's schools can be in any doubt of the seriousness of the situation. In short, in 2016, Swindon's children were failed by its schools at every key stage.

Primary school performance, which has previously shown a positive trend of improvement in Swindon, is now a concern.

The 2016 phonics outcomes for Swindon are some of the poorest in the country, with only 76% of six-year-olds meeting the expected standard. This places Swindon in the bottom 10 local authorities, nationally.

At key stage 1, Swindon's seven-year-olds are the joint lowest performers in reading in the south west.

At key stage 2, Swindon's outcomes are amongst the lowest in the country with only 44% of 11-year-olds reaching the new expected standard in reading, writing and

mathematics. Only two per cent of pupils reached a higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics compared with five per cent nationally in England.

At key stage 4, pupils' outcomes raise similar concerns. Headline measures for these pupils are below national across the board. It is also worrying to see so few pupils at Swindon secondary schools achieving the English Baccalaureate. Just 17.3% of pupils were successful in 2016, which places Swindon in the bottom 20 local authorities in England for this measure.

Recent inspections of five secondary schools in Swindon indicate a trend of decline. While the The Ridgeway School & Sixth Form College maintained its good rating, Kingsdown School failed to improve from requires improvement, Churchfields Academy declined from good to requires improvement, The Dorcan Academy and Isambard Community School declined from requires improvement to inadequate. The proportion of pupils attending a good secondary school in Swindon has now declined from the previous 52% at 31 August 2015 to just 47% at 30 September 2016.

The proportion of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion is alarmingly high in both secondary and special schools in Swindon. The 2015 data shows that the fixed-period exclusions per pupil in secondary schools were 10.08% compared to the national average of 7.51%. In Swindon special schools, this figure was 68.36% compared to the national average of 13.54%.

In the light of the continuing and deepening concerns about school performance in Swindon, I urge all involved in leading and supporting these schools to take immediate action to bring about rapid and sustained improvements across the authority. Headteachers, chief executives of multi-academy trusts, senior political leaders, governors, local authority officers and the regional schools commissioner must act swiftly and in unison to ensure that pupils in Swindon have better outcomes and the skills and qualifications to improve their life chances and employment prospects.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bradley Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Bradley Simmons HMI
Regional Director, South West