

Cabinet

16 March 2016



Educational Attainment/Standards Report 2015

Report of Corporate Management Team Rachael Shimmin Corporate Director Children & Adults Services Councillor Ossie Johnson Portfolio Holder Children & Young Peoples Services

Purpose of the Report

1. This report summarises how Durham County Council's education department continues to provide support and intervention, including intensive support for schools in most need, to ensure the best educational outcomes for children and young people in Durham. It also sets out the results from tests and examinations at the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4/5 for 2015 which, when compared with national averages, provide the key outcome measures for early years, primary and secondary education respectively.

Early Years Foundation Stage - Background

2. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are assessed by the percentage reaching at least "expected" standards in the Early Learning Goals. Assessments are made against pre-set levels, with internal and external moderations.

Early Years Foundation Stage - outcomes

3. At the end of their Reception year, the percentage of children in Durham reaching at least expected standards increased in all Early Learning Goals. The biggest improvements were in the key goals of writing and number. Boys' results in speaking also improved significantly on the previous year.

Early Years % GLD	2014		2015	
	Durham LA	National	Durham LA	National
All	57	60	64	66
Boys	48	52	56	59
Girls	66	69	72	74

4. For all children the maths Early Learning Goal remains furthest behind the national cohort, followed by reading. Boys remain behind the national cohort in terms of the ELG of understanding. The early years team in the Education Development Service continues to work with schools and settings to address these areas and continues to support what has been a very significant overall improvement on previous outcomes.

Key Stage 2 - Background

5. At the end of the primary stage of education there are still formal, national assessments of pupils' attainment in mathematics and English, through externally set and marked tests for all 11 year-olds. Writing is judged by teacher assessments, moderated by the local authority. Assessments are made against pre-set levels, with level 4 being the "expected level" for this age group and level 6 being the highest achievable through the tests.

Key Stage 2 - Outcomes

6. The table below sets out the percentage of pupils in Durham and nationally that achieved level 4+ in English (reading), English (writing), mathematics, and the three combined at the expected level for this age group, in 2015. This is the key reported outcome measure at KS2.

Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Maths combined (RWM) – Level 4+				
	2014		2015	
	Durham LA	National	Durham LA	National
Reading	89	89	90	89
Writing (teacher assessment)	85	85	87	87
Mathematics	87	86	89	87
Reading/Writing/Mathematics	79	79	82	80

7. The strong trend of improvement at KS2 in Durham continues year on year with both genders now above national for the percentage achieving level 4+ RWM.
8. The percentage of all children getting Level 5 or above in Writing improved by 5 percentage points, bringing it in line with national. As this was identified in 2014 as a priority area and resources from the Education Development Services were deployed to focus on improvement in writing at level 5 and above, this is an encouraging outcome.
9. Against this trend of improvement, results for disadvantaged pupils improved even faster than for others in the local authority in writing at Level 4+, which again reflects targeted support for schools from EDS and is a significant outcome.
10. The proportion of pupils making at least expected progress (2+ levels of progress) improved again in 2015; 93% in Reading, 95% in Writing, and 92% in Maths. The local authority's value added score for progress from KS1 to KS2 is 100.3, putting Durham in the 25th percentile; the value added score for reading puts Durham even higher, in the 17th percentile.
11. In summary, children completing Key Stage 2 in Durham schools in 2015 made better progress in all three subjects than those leaving primary schools in 2014, continuing a strong trend of improvement. This confirms that Durham pupils at the end of Year 6 are increasingly well-prepared for the next stage of their education and transition to secondary school.

KS1 to KS2 - % making expected progress				
	2014		2015	
	Durham LA	National	Durham LA	National
Reading	92	91	93	91
Writing	94	93	95	94
Mathematics	91	90	92	90

Key Stage 4 - Background

12. Assessment at Key Stage 4, which represents the end of compulsory schooling, continues to be through externally set and marked GCSE and GCSE equivalent examinations across a wide range of subjects and courses. These are graded from A*-G with national benchmarks of achievement. Annual results from examinations at each of Key Stages 4 and 5 (sixth form) are analysed in order to identify trends across the local authority and to inform discussions with specific schools regarding challenge and support.
13. The table below shows 2015 outcomes at Key Stage 4:

Key Stage 4 outcomes				
	2014		2015	
	Durham LA	National	Durham LA	National
% 5+ A*-C including Eng and Maths	57.6	56.6	54.5	56.1
% 3 levels progress - English	74	72	70	70
% 3 levels progress - Mathematics	60	66	61	67
% C+ English	72	69	68	68
% C+ Mathematics	67	68	67	68

14. The decline at KS4 of the percentage of students achieving 5A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and Mathematics, and the fact that this fell below the national average (albeit for the first time since 2007), resulted in a letter of concern being written by Nick Hudson, Regional Director of Ofsted. This letter was sent to Chief Executive 's and to all local MP's. A similar letter was sent to the Chief Executives and MP's of a number of local authorities in the north east region.
15. A number of schools that underperformed were academies, including 2 large Catholic academies - St Bedes, Lanchester and St Johns Catholic School and Sixth Form in Bishop Auckland - as well as North Durham Academy, Staindrop and Teesdale. The local authority alerted the School's Commissioner of this in advance of results being validated.
16. A letter of concern was sent to each school that fell below national average and this requested an outline of actions to be taken to ensure no repeat of the poor performance of 2015.
17. Schools have responded immediately to ensure that a similar situation does not arise in 2016. Substantial planning has already taken place in the local authority to address the decline and this has been communicated to the Regional Director and to MPs. School improvement advisors are working with subject leaders and senior leaders in all Durham schools where GCSE results declined, to secure robust improvement plans and support where departments are underperforming.
18. In October 2015, the Education Development Service appointed a full-time Lead for Secondary Standards, recruiting to this post a former principal of one of our highest performing and most inclusive schools. The post-holder is already engaging with head teachers in every secondary school and deploying the wider team to ensure more effective and early sharing of performance data, improved moderation and standardisation across schools and a better dialogue with examination boards, through subject networks, to avoid any repeat of the disappointing results in 2015.

19. Bespoke training has been offered to governing bodies of all schools and academies currently performing below national average, based on the 2015 KS4 results.
20. The decline in 2015 can be explained by a number of factors, and action has been taken, as described above, to ensure against any repetition. As in previous years, a number of schools in County Durham entered pupils for the English IGCSE (International GCSE), a well-respected examination option which retains an element of coursework and a slightly higher percentage of marks for speaking and listening. In 2015, unannounced changes to the way the IGCSE was marked, with lower than expected marks on the Higher paper, Q1, exacerbated by an unusually narrow mark range between grades, impacted adversely on results. Challenges were made by schools nationally although very few adjustments were made through re-marks.
21. Even taking into account this drop in English GCSE results, outcomes in County Durham remain higher than north east averages.
22. Outcomes in mathematics improved at a slower rate than anticipated in 2015. This is a reflection in the majority of cases on a training need for staff where recent changes to examination entry policy, with the full examination assessed terminally, are still having an impact on some schools. It also reflects the difficulty recruiting specialist maths teachers across the country. Once again, Education Development Service advisors are working in the majority of schools where this shortcoming has been identified.
23. As in the case of English, mathematics outcomes in Durham remain above NE averages.
24. One incidental factor revealed by analysis is that County Durham's girls were more affected by the unprecedented changes outlined above than boys, with bigger drops in the proportion of girls making expected progress or reaching Grade C+. A similar picture is emerging nationally. Durham's girls are now further behind their peers than Durham's boys, and this is also a subject of consideration when EDS staff are working in schools and with school leaders.
25. Despite this year's setback, the year-on-year rate of improvement in GCSE outcomes has been significantly greater than the national rate of improvement since 2007. In summary, robust plans and actions are in place to ensure that any similar problems do not occur in 2016.

Key Stage 5 results

26. Outcomes at Key Stage 5 continue to compare very well with national averages. The average grade per entry continues to improve year on year. In all recognised national benchmarks where the data has been made available, Durham is ahead of national averages.

	%2+A*-E		Average points score (APS)		Average points per entry (APE)	
	Durham (State-funded School Sixth Forms)	National (State-funded School Sixth Forms)	Durham (State-funded School Sixth Forms)	National (State-funded School Sixth Forms)	Durham (State-funded School Sixth Forms)	National (State-funded School Sixth Forms)
2013	98.9	97.9	808.9	779.6	218.7	213.9
2014	98.7	98.0	809.7	775.3	218.7	214.8

2015	98.8	98.3	803.7	771.9	219.9	215.7
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Source: DfE SFRs, A level and other level 3 results (revised)

Narrowing attainment gaps

27. Gaps in attainment are monitored at all key stages. Particular indicators monitored are:

- The gap between achievement of children eligible for free school meals and the rest at the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The gap between children eligible for Free School Meals and the rest achieving Level 2b or above in Writing
- The achievement gap between Durham pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and Durham pupils not eligible for Pupil Premium funding achieving Level 4 in Reading, Writing and Maths at Key Stage 2
- The achievement gap between Durham pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and Durham pupils not eligible for Pupil Premium funding achieving 5 A*-C GCSE's including English and Maths at Key Stage 4

28. Targeted work is being undertaken with schools to narrow gaps, particularly between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. In 2015, although some gaps were seen to be narrowing (see paragraph 9, above), at least partly as a result of the combined efforts of EDS and schools, it is recognised in the local authority that there is still improvement required, especially at Key Stage 4.

29. The table below shows statistics for narrowing attainment gaps across the key indicators:

	2013	2014	2015
Gap between achievement of children eligible for free school meals and the rest at EYFS	21 pts (47-26)	22 pts (62-40)	20 pts (68-48)
The gap between children eligible for FSM and the rest achieving Level 2b or above in Writing	21 pts (74-53)	23 pts (76-54)	19 pts (78-59)
Achievement gap between Durham pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and Durham pupils not eligible for Pupil Premium funding achieving Level 4 in Reading, Writing and Maths at Key Stage 2	21 pts (86-65)	16 pts (85-69)	17 pts (88-71)
Achievement gap between Durham pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and Durham pupils not eligible for Pupil Premium funding achieving 5 A*-C GCSE's including English and Maths at Key Stage 4	30 pts (72.9-42.4)	29 pts (67.5 - 38.3)	30 pts (65.2 - 35.3)

The role of DCC's school improvement team

30. In almost all cases, schools are supported in their efforts to achieve these very high educational standards by the direct challenge and support of school improvement officers. These officers work closely with head teachers, senior leadership teams and governing bodies to interpret school data accurately and to set appropriately demanding attainment targets for all pupils. Comprehensive data analysis enables school improvement officers to establish consistent baselines so that support is well-identified and the challenge to improve is always accurately gauged.

31. School improvement officers provide subject specific support and intervention, as required, including supporting schools with monitoring, evaluation, work scrutiny and moderation of standards. Unlike other local authorities in the region, Durham provides termly networks in almost all subjects, and these are well-attended and highly regarded for the quality of training provided and the strategic direction and co-ordination they offer for mid leaders in schools. The school improvement team is involved in a comprehensive training offer for all teaching and non-teaching staff, from those joining the profession to experienced head teachers.
32. A published intervention and support policy is well understood by schools, and clarifies the level of monitoring and support provided, which is in inverse proportion to success according to Ofsted inspection criteria. The Head of education and school improvement managers meet regularly with the Lead Member.
33. Where schools are identified through the council's monitoring as requiring improvement (or in danger of falling into an Ofsted category of concern), action to improve standards in these schools is decisive. The focus of action is predominantly on securing provision and outcomes for pupils with support that is immediate, intensive and sustained until internal capacity in the school has been assured and attainment improved.

Conclusion

31. Durham continues to compare favourably with the national picture in terms of test and examination outcomes at Early Years, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 5. While still comparing favourably with regional outcomes, an unpredicted but not unexplained dip in results at Key Stage 4 is being addressed by direct and robust intervention. Work with schools continues to narrow the attainment gaps for the most disadvantaged children in County Durham.
32. The local authority continues to have a confident and firmly established knowledge of attainment and progress measures, with understanding of key areas for improvement. It is as a direct result of the thorough and detailed involvement of school improvement officers in the process of support and challenge to schools that standards remain high and continue to improve across the majority of Durham schools, and robust plans are in place to guard against any possible future dip in outcomes.

Recommendation

33. Cabinet is requested to note the content of this report.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk – Potential reputational issues if results dip in the future

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - NA

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation – Any changes to school monitoring systems will be subject to consultation with schools.

Procurement - None

Disability Issues - None

Legal Implications - None