

# **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING**



### **WORKING GROUP REPORT INTO KEY STAGE 4 EDUCATION**

## **PASSIONATE ABOUT EDUCATION: PASSIONATE ABOUT TEACHING**

April 2007



Making a difference where you live

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# DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

### WORKING GROUP REPORT- KEY STAGE 4

#### PASSIONATE ABOUT EDUCATION PASSIONATE ABOUT TEACHING

*“Of some of our teachers, we remember their foibles and mannerisms, of others, their kindness and encouragement, or their fierce devotion to standards of work that we probably did not share at the time. And of those who inspired us most, we remember what they cared about, and that they cared about us, and the person we might become. It is the quality of caring about ideas and values, this fascination with the potential for growth within people, this depth and fervour about doing things well and striving for excellence, that comes closest to what I mean in describing a “passionate teacher”. (Robert Fried-The Passionate Teacher)*

*If you require this information summarised in other languages or formats, such as Braille, large print or talking tapes, please contact: (0191) 383 3506*

" إذا كنت بحاجة إلى تلقي خلاصة هذه المعلومات في اللغة العربية فيرجى الاتصال بالرقم 0191 383 3673 "

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यदि आपनि बाल्याय एह उदाउल्लिउर एकटि सारसंखेप हान डवे अनुग्रह करे 0191 383 3673 नहरें फोन करन।

यदि आप इरा सूचना का सार हिन्दी में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया 0191 383 3673 पर फोन करें।

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## FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR ALAN BARKER



Let me begin by paying tribute to the late John Dormer who sadly passed away a few months ago. John was an important influence on this project where he shared his breadth of knowledge and understanding about education matters. We miss him together with his contribution and passion for education.

The Council Corporate Improvement priority to “improve educational attainment” is fundamental to improving the quality of lives of all our communities. Education must be seen as the stepping-stone to achieving our ambitions, enabling our young people of today to rise up to the challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Overview and Scrutiny focus on “better educational attainment at Key Stage 4” is a key element of the Corporate Improvement priority. The working group was determined to add value through the Overview and Scrutiny process by looking in detail at the issue associated with the need for continuous improvement with better results at Key Stage 4.

Let me be clear from the outset. The focus was to look at the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C passes at GCSE or equivalent with an analysis of why this is so, what are the barriers to educational attainment, what are the drivers and where do the challenges exist.

The school year 2006/07 brought excellent results for our schools in County Durham. Our rate of improvement was faster than the national average and it was expected that we would have narrowed the gap between County Durham and national figures.

This was welcome news by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group. We are doing something unique in County Durham with our results reflecting an improvement year-on-year. Our commitment remains to improve educational attainment and be able to give our young people the opportunity they deserve.

Note: Key Stage 4 - all pupils 2006/07:

- 5 A\*-Cs up from 51.3% to 56.5% - the largest ever single year rise.
- 5 A\*-C including English and Maths up from 38.3% to 40.7%.
- 22 schools out of 36 achieved their best ever result.
- 8 schools are now over 70% at 5 A\*-C compared to 3 last year.
- % 5A\*-G and % 1 A\*-G similar to last year.

The question then remained - what is it we are doing and how can we build on this good practice?

Finally, I must take this opportunity to congratulate the Children and Young People's Service on achieving Beacon Status.

The Beacon scheme was established by the government in 1999 to identify authorities able to serve as centres of excellence and share the learning with others. I note the judging panel's comments which said the Council's vision and strategies for achieving school improvement and raising academic achievement were "...outstanding, with a clear commitment and ambition for the children and young people of County Durham".

Cllr Alan Barker  
Chair  
Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the Development of Lifelong Learning

## **PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The focus on educational attainment, as one of the Council Corporate Improvement Priorities, is to ensure that the gap in school results between the highest and the lowest achievers is reduced and that the gap between boys and girls achieving Key Stage 4 is also reduced.

The working group was fully aware of the latest exam results (2006) that showed that 56.5% of pupils achieved 5 GCSE passes at A\*-C grade which represents an increase of twelve percentage points over the last three years.

With this in mind, the working group wanted to ensure that they were outcome focused and would provide challenge by setting the following terms of reference that look at the key themes that impact on better improving key stage 4 results namely:-

- Are we achieving value for money through our existing approach?
- How do we maintain improvement and ensure continuous improvement?
- What is the nature of Leadership in the education system and in schools in particular?
- What is the nature of school support to drive improvement?
- Why do boys under-perform and how do we narrow the gender gap in this regard?
- What are we doing about low ability achievement, namely grades D to G?
- How do we support children not in school, namely home/hospital issues, children excluded from school;
- What impact do socio-economic circumstances have on educational attainment?
- How do we compare with similar Local Authorities like Durham with Key Stage 4 results?
- Can we identify examples of good practice nationally, regionally and locally?

## APPROACH

The Working Group agreed to take evidence from key witnesses involved directly and indirectly in improving the education of children in the County. They also agreed to receive correspondence, organise visits, meet with relevant parties to ensure members fully understood and received evidence on this matter before reaching any conclusions or making any recommendations.

The following people gave evidence to the working group:-

John Deller	Consultant BETT
Janet Bridges	Head Teacher, Stanley School of Technology
Helen Richards	Head of History, Framwellgate Comprehensive
Clare Smith	Assistant Head Teacher responsible for Learning and Teaching, Sedgefield Community College
Gill Eshelby	Deputy Head of Youth Engagement Service
Maureen Clare	Head of Access and Inclusion, Children and Young People's Services
Jane Le Sage	Access Services Manager, Children and Young People's Services
Toni Spoons	Deputy Head Teacher, Belmont Comprehensive
Kim Jobson	Head of Human Resources
David Ford	Chief Inspector, Children and Young People's Service
Maureen Bates	Head Teacher, St Bede's R C School, Lanchester
Paul Gillis	Spennymoor Comprehensive School
Joan Sjovol	Framwellgate
Gerard Moran	King John
Steve Rochester	King James, Bishop Auckland
Phil Bowden	Ferryhill
Joanne Cummins	IMPACT
Clive Horton	IMPACT

## REPORTING

The working group agreed to report, in the first instance, to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee on its findings then to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet with its recommendations requesting Cabinet to respond to these recommendations via an action plan.

## MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUP

The membership of the working group was drawn from the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee. It would be fair to say that not all of the members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee attended all the meetings of the working group.

Alan Barker chaired the working group. George Porter was Vice Chair.

The following Councillors and co-opted members were invited to meetings: Bell, Burlinson, Coates, Ebbatson, N. Foster, Graham, Gray, Holroyd, Hunter, Iveson, Lethbridge, Magee, Manton, Meir, Ord, Porter, Rodgers, Robinson, Simmons, Stelling, Stradling, Tennant, Wade and Williams.

Church Representative: Rev. S. Bamber

Parent Governor Representatives: A, Atkinson and A. Tallentire;

Co-opted Members: Mr. J. Dormer, Ms. L Bailey, and Councillor M. Robinson

## **METHODOLOGY**

A detailed project plan for all the working group meetings was developed. (See appendix 1). The plan, in effect, is a scoping document that identifies who attended the meetings and the nature of the evidence they gave.

The working group held a total of nine meetings between September 2006 and January 2007.

All these meetings were held in County Hall with 'expert' witnesses invited to give evidence in relation to the terms of reference.

A detailed project plan (see Appendix 1) identifies who attended these meetings and the nature of the evidence they gave.

A number of visits to local schools/educational establishments took place during this period. The purpose of all these visits was to gain an insight, first hand, of the issues facing educationalists and the approach they take in school improvement and delivering educational outcomes.

Members of the working group visited three schools to observe the way 'Aspirational Audits' were managed as part of the planned approach for school improvement. These meetings involved the County Council's Chief Inspector, Head of the Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT) and the Head Teacher and Departmental Heads.

Members visited three IMPACT centres and met with staff and pupils in these centres. This visit was facilitated by the Access Service of the Children and Young People's directorate.

Members visited Spennymoor High School to meet with teachers, governors and pupils.

The Chair of the working group met with the Durham Association of Secondary Heads (DASH) to explore key issues facing Head Teachers in the education system.

Finally, research on best practice, facilitated by Northumbria University on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Team, is available to assist in demonstrating

examples of what works elsewhere to assist in any gaps with evidence we may have overlooked – Appendix 2.

## **WHAT IS KEY STAGE 4?**

The County Council's focus for educational attainment is to ensure that the gap in school results between the highest and the lowest achievers is reduced. The main focus is to continue to achieve at Key Stage 4.

Key Stage 4 represents GCSE exam results taken by pupils up to 16 years old.

NOTE:- Pupils in year 6 (up to age 11) take Key Stage 2 exams; pupils in year 9 (secondary education and up to age 14) Key Stage 3; and pupils in year 10 and 11 (up to 16) take Key Stage 4 (GCSE exams).

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

- Three years ago, the KS4 results for County Durham were well below the national average and, overall, only twenty authorities were below County Durham. Since that date, there has been a significant improvement and the Authority is almost halfway up the national league table. In addition, the Authority is twentieth for overall level of improvement and following inspection only one school has a notice to improve.
- Raising Educational Standards must be part of a whole-school improvement strategy aiming to motivate students and raise achievement by improving teaching, making learning more enjoyable and giving wider choices in the curriculum. It is about introducing alternative curricula to respond to educational need.
- Leadership in schools is seen as one of the main drivers for school improvement and raising educational attainment. The commitment to the belief that “every child has potential” has been a key element in the evidence from this exercise with leaders in schools investing in children's education through targeted and creative approaches to learning.
- A Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) was secured over five years ago (2001/02). The LIG aimed to accelerate the improvement in standards, to bring about a step change in pupil attainment by using the grant to build capacity for sustained improvement, to strengthen leadership at all levels and build the school's leadership capacity for sustained improvement. Where necessary, the grant was used by LEAs to tackle ineffective leadership. It helped to stimulate collaboration between schools to build leadership capacity and strengthen teaching and learning throughout the school.

**The purpose of the grant** was to strengthen leadership at all levels in secondary schools, but particularly in Senior Leadership Teams (SLT), and to



contribute to the transformation of our secondary schools so that each school is characterised by:-

- A core belief that every pupil can achieve high standards
- Effective systems that enable high expectations to be met
- Every pupil working toward explicit targets in each subject
- Every teacher using assessment, diagnosis and data to maximise the progress of students
- Every teacher knowing his/her impact on pupil performance, with time and opportunity to improve his/her practice
- Regular review of curriculum, timetable and other resources to achieve high standards
- Personal support and conditions for learning for every pupil that helps them overcome barriers to learning
- A clear awareness of appropriate benchmarks, pockets of under-performance and priorities for improvement
- A strong contribution to improving the school system as a whole.

In Durham, the LIG supported five collaborative groupings of schools. These groups set up systems of peer review and shared developments on curriculum, teaching and learning and institutional leadership. The funding provided the “seed-corn” to support collaboration and allowed schools to enhance, or re-structure, schools and subject leadership (in some cases by supporting an exit strategy for less than effective leader/managers).

The collaborative provided the foundation for the current, very positive ethos of best practice sharing and, therefore, provided valuable support in the early years of the BETT strategy. Some very strong partnerships were formed and many of these have been sustained with LA support although the LIG funding has now disappeared. In fact, one of the early LIG partnerships provided the genesis of the Durham Community Business College/Fyndoune federation.

- Durham County Council has maintained its commitment to supporting school improvement and pupil attainment by continuing to invest in approaches that make a difference. One such approach is the Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT).

The local authority has a fundamental role to play in supporting educational attainment and raised standards, by providing leadership, influence, challenge, co-ordination and support.

The new arrangements for a Children and Young People’s Service have helped to deliver this role.

- The Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT) has made a significant contribution in raising educational achievement and attainment in our schools. Schools have taken full advantage of the support offered by local authorities (BETT) and this has been most effective when schools and local authorities

work to a clear, agreed support plan and there are regular meetings to check progress and plan next steps.

The Beyond Expectations project was created in April 2003 to address the County Council's priority of under performance at Key Stage 4. Investing in school improvement was seen as critical to its strategic regeneration agenda. The bulk of additional resource has been devolved to schools (approx. £1.8m) with some held centrally (approx. £200k) for co-ordination and consultants to add to the capacity of schools improvement strategies.

Central to the strategy is the ability of the LA to respond flexibly and directly to increase the capacity of schools in specific aspects of their work. It is supported by annual "aspirational audits" in each secondary school. These bring together senior members of the project team and the Education Development Service to work with the school leadership team to identify areas for development and agree improvement contracts.

- **Key Stage 4 results for all pupils 2006/07:**
  - 5 A\*-Cs up from 51.3% to 56.5% - the largest ever single year rise.
  - 5 A\*-C including English and Maths up from 38.3% to 40.7%.
  - 22 schools out of 36 achieved their best ever result.
  - 8 schools are now over 70% at 5 A\*-C compared to 3 last year.
  - % 5A\*-G and % 1 A\*-G similar to last year.
- In 2002, there were twenty schools that achieved fewer than 40% A-C grades and now there are only four below this level.
- In terms of value added, as measured by Fischer Family Trust, the Authority is in the 13<sup>th</sup> percentile. Value added is a comparison of pupil attainment with what they would have been expected to attain, taking into account prior attainment and other factors e.g. socio-economic, gender difference and so on.
- It is recognised that further progress needs to be made and that there are still issues that need to be addressed. Post 16 learning remains a challenge.
- The curriculum is responsive and innovative in engaging young people. Subject specialists have now been recruited in every subject and they provide support and guidance in their curriculum area. Best practice is disseminated and shared with all schools.

- **The Inspection Service has two challenges:-**
  - a. To assist those young people who did not have any qualifications to enable them to move on to the next stages of education;
  - b. To work with those schools that have achieved better than expected to ensure they maintain the same standard of results.
- Partnership arrangements are important in that services are joined up, have a shared outcome and shared vision. A 'family of schools' approach is vital to securing outcomes in education for all our children.
- Schools must engage and involve students at each stage of the improvement process and in developing improvement strategies.
- A personalised learning approach is key to success. Personalised learning is about tailoring education to individual need, interest and aptitude so as to ensure that every pupil achieves and reaches the highest standards possible, notwithstanding their background or circumstances and right across the spectrum of achievement. Monitoring and tracking of poor performance and establishing additional support strategies for areas to be found most challenging is part of the approach of personalised learning. Monitoring in schools on each pupil's progress, and not just those on the borderline of achievement, is essential. The information held in the 'Panda' system has assisted individual tracking of pupils and allows pupils to be advised on which course they would achieve better results thus enabling pupils to make their own choices.
- There is still a problem with the difference in achievement between boys and girls. However, the position is improving and, in some schools, boys are now performing better than girls. The gap has narrowed to about **10%**
- A targeted approach has contributed to this success – getting the right course for the pupil through a curricular pathway analysis informed by the needs of each pupil.
- High staff turnover, reliance on short-term temporary staff and senior managers becoming absorbed by other priorities does not bode well for educational outcomes. Sickness levels and the ability of middle managers and higher managers to manage is an important consideration.
- The Employee Relations team of the County Council's Human Resources operates, in part, as a traded service via a service level agreement (SLA) providing advice and support to 300+ schools across County Durham. Concerns over capacity to support schools remain an issue.
- An audit process was undertaken to determine strengths and weaknesses and to identify best practice in each school. This review helped identify each school's needs. Initially, schools viewed the process with trepidation but now

there are excellent relationships with each school and they are collaborating with each other. One example of this has been the sharing of teachers between schools.

- Indeed, the notion of ‘twinning’ arrangements (co-operation) across a group of schools that could offer support to each other in specialist areas was promoted in the scrutiny review.
- Aspirational Audits are key in identifying where support is needed in the school. The response is to place expert teachers where needed, assisting the leadership in the school to focus on pupil weaknesses with practical help to improve in those areas.
- Some of the establishments used for the provision of IMPACT are inappropriate – there is a need to create the right environment for learning and for students not to feel stigmatised. This could be taken up in the current BSF programme that is currently out for consultation.
- Some examples of good practice include initiatives to change the way parents are involved. For example, a school is closed for a day to enable parents to come in and discuss their child’s progress; some schools have introduced academic learning mentors (who support and work with children to learn); the Authority is introducing Parent Support Advisors in forty of our schools. These advisors will work with parents through a family link programme supporting parents to support their children.
- The Youth Engagement Service plays an important role in contributing to educational attainment as it prevents offending by helping young people achieve their full potential as active, positive members of the community. Part of its work is to support young people by offering a range of social inclusion programmes. Opportunities for vocational education provide an alternative to exclusion.
- Overall, schools are doing well with resources coming in to support school improvement. However, a three-year budget planning cycle would be welcome so that the Leadership can be clear about how much they have and can plan ahead for the future.
- The 2005 Education White Paper (2005), *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, noted that “...a child’s educational achievements are still too strongly linked to their parents’ social and economic background - a key barrier to social mobility”. Socio-economic circumstances, particularly those related to the personal and family background of individual pupils, can have significant impacts on educational attainment.

## MAIN MESSAGES

- There is a clear need to celebrate our successes and, in particular, to note value added. Value added is a comparison of pupil attainment with what they would have been expected to attain taking into account prior attainment and other factors e.g. socio economic, gender difference and so on.
- A positive development has been a partnership approach in working with schools.
- The evidence is overwhelming in that leadership in schools is one of the main drivers for educational attainment where the leaders in our schools believe in the potential of the pupils and support them to achieve that potential.
- Leaders in schools articulated the need for support in managing poor performance, sickness and capability.
- Responding to the needs of the child through alternative curricula, pathways to learning, personalised learning and increased choice has made an important difference to those children who routinely under-achieve, enabling them to thrive in subject areas that capture their imagination.
- Directly related to alternative curricula is the need to monitor and track pupil progress so that 'interventions' and appropriate 'targeting' is informed by the child's needs. This has worked when targeting and supporting boys who tend to under-achieve.
- The relationship between the school, the community and the family is an important part of the solution. Family support strategies facilitated by family link workers, for example, consolidate not only support for the family but also support for the child's progress through school.
- Direct, hands-on support for schools has a significant role to play, not only in raising standards but also in contributing to educational attainment and the school's success. All the head teachers we engaged in this process spoke very highly about Durham County Council's Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT), which has assisted them to strengthen areas of their curriculum through specialists in their field going into schools to offer support, advice and teaching thereby contributing to respective school action plans working for raised achievement. Other areas of support focus on youth engagement initiatives that aim to address social inclusion through the County Durham Youth Engagement Service (CDYES).
- The DCC Access Service via the IMPACT initiative works with children who have been excluded from schools. The commitment to these young people from the staff is second to none. The issue that needs addressing is an appropriate learning environment for the young people who are part of the IMPACT initiative. There is a definite need to invest in facilities and services for pupils who are excluded.

- We need to invest in a holistic approach to raising performance in our schools. This is about the seeing the child/pupil in a wider community/societal context of family and community and not just within the context of a school environment. An important element of this holistic approach is investing and supporting the family to improve educational outcomes for their children.
- Build on the success of the Looked after Children educational outcomes (06/07).
- At every step, it is important to take stock, self-evaluate and strategically plan to ensure the best response and best outcomes for areas of concern.
- Sharing good practice takes place across a number of school areas. Opportunities for direct teacher support across a network of schools - say a type of 'twinning' arrangement based on curricula needs - is evident but patchy. This area should be formalised (depending on capacity and expertise in the schools) by establishing a twinning arrangement where schools that need particular curricula support receive it from the school that has the capacity and expertise to offer it.
- The challenge remains - Post 16 Education and the need to embed a culture of lifelong learning. Participation in higher education and attainment at GCSE level are strongly influenced by people's social and economic background. Nearly **nine out of ten** 16 year olds from higher professional occupational backgrounds were in full-time education in 2002 compared with around **six out of ten** of those with parents in routine or lower supervisory occupations. (Babb 2005)

## CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improvement in Key Stage 4 results has been more dramatic in some schools than others and all need to be brought to the same standard.
- The role of the **BETT** has been crucial in raising educational attainment in schools. This is a valued resource by all secondary schools in County Durham.
- The challenge now rests with **Post 16 learning**. We need to extend the reach of the BETT for Post 16 learning.

### RECOMMENDATION:

The County Council should maintain its commitment to supporting school improvement and pupil attainment by continuing to invest in approaches that make a difference.

The BETT has been an excellent example of raising standards and pupil attainment. The County Council should consider investing in this approach in meeting the needs of young people into Post 16 education.

The County Council should publicise the work of the BETT as a valuable resource to our schools. The Beacon award presents the County Council with an opportunity to do this locally, regionally and nationally.

The County Council should monitor the effectiveness of such initiatives through regular evaluation. The outcome of such evaluative study should support the long-term viability and mainstreaming of such initiatives.

- **Leadership** in schools and in the County Council is seen as one of the main drivers for school improvement.
- **Poor performance and capability** in schools is a challenge. There have been difficulties associated with long-term sickness absences of teaching staff in some schools. Durham County Council has procedures in place to support Head Teachers deal with sickness absence and capability concerns.

## RECOMMENDATION:

The County Council has a fundamental role to play in supporting educational attainment and raised standards, by providing leadership, influence, challenge, co-ordination and support.

The County Council should revisit the approach developed through funding made available by the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) in supporting capacity for sustained improvement, to strengthen leadership at all levels and build the school's leadership capacity for sustained improvement.

The County Council should consider this approach with schools that may be deemed as failing because of poor performance and capability issues. Members of the working group note that, in some cases, the LIG supported an exit strategy for less than effective leaders/managers.

- Tracking and monitoring of students is fundamental. This will enable the school to understand the needs of each individual and to empower each child so that they are in a good position to make the right choices.
- **Personalised learning** is a key approach to achieve educational outcomes. **Alternative curriculum** ensures that the needs of the child are taken into account and managed in an effective/responsive way.
- It is important that parents are involved in their children's education. **Parent Support advisors** are welcome development for schools.

## RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should continue to support and invest in approaches that focus on personalised learning through for example alternative curricula that target both under-achievers and children who are 'gifted and talented'.

The County Council should ensure coverage across all of our schools with 'parent support advisors'. This is an important role as it supports the 'family' to realise its potential.

Parent Support Advisors should be subject to an evaluation within the context of a family support strategy looking to demonstrate the effectiveness of the role.

- A '**family of schools**' approach is vital to securing outcomes in education for all our children.
- Formalise 'twinning' arrangements for schools to share best practice and support each other where specialist knowledge is required.

## RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should give a firm commitment to the principle of a 'family of



schools' approach which are networked and able to support each other in specialist areas, sharing expertise and contributing to educational attainment and school improvement.

- There are other factors that can influence children's educational attainment levels including:-
  - pre-school, neighbourhoods and schools
  - parental beliefs, values, aspirations and attitudes
  - parental skills in terms of warmth, discipline and education behaviours.

Research suggests (Babb 2005) that the profile of children most likely to be **low educational achievers** in England is:-

- Male
  - From a low socio-economic background
  - With parents who have low or no qualifications
  - Living in a single-parent household
  - Having many siblings
  - Attending a state school rather than an independent school
  - Attending a school with a high rate of free-school meal eligibility
  - Workless households
  - Certain ethnic groups (e.g. black males, travellers and children whose first language is not English).
- Support for **disadvantaged pupils** which were found to be beneficial include:-
    - The provision of learning mentors to help students overcome educational or behavioural problems
    - Learning support units to provide short-term teaching and support programmes for difficult students
    - A programme to provide extra support for 5-10% of pupils in each school who were considered gifted or talented.

The County Council can have some positive impacts on pupil performance and attainment. Ofsted and the Audit Commission (2002) found evidence of positive effects from social inclusion strategies. For example, it was found that "in the most disadvantaged local Education Authority, standards are slightly higher among authorities giving better support for access".

LEAs have also generally been effective in delivering many of the government's school improvement initiatives, in particular the literacy and numeracy strategies. In addition, high performing LEAs can have positive effects on the *quality of school management and efficiency*. Ofsted/Audit Commission (2002) found that "more primary and secondary schools have been judged to have very good management and efficiency in those LEAs that give good support to school managers than in the LEAs that are weakest in that respect".

- At a general level, it is clear that a multitude of complex and inter-related socio-economic factors contribute significantly to educational attainment outcomes at all Key Stages: indeed, more so than factors such as the type of school or educational system/structure generally.
- More specifically, it is parental background, education and income that are probably the most important combination of factors influencing educational attainment. This suggests greater attention needs to be given to this aspect of policy by public agencies, for instance, measures to support parents and carers in the home, improving parenting skills, providing childcare provision so parents can access to employment and attempting to change parental values, attitudes, aspirations and behaviours can all contribute to improving a child's educational attainment.
- It is important to note that interventions at an early stage in a child's life and educational career are more likely to have long-term positive impacts. The watchword is earlier the better.
- It is also clear that programmes which provide extra funding and resources can drive higher attainment, especially if these are carefully targeted and linked to particular teaching and learning strategies. In fact, cost is not the only issue as low or virtually zero cost initiatives based on high quality teaching practices can also have positive impacts on attainment levels.
- **Councils can make a positive contribution** to educational outcomes by tackling the wider 'social context' in their areas that affects children such as measures and strategies to alleviate child poverty and social exclusion. Perhaps, most significantly, councils can make the biggest impact in those areas of education and child welfare policy and service delivery which are still their responsibility such as Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, Looked after Children and monitoring school standards and admissions policies. Ensuring that these services and responsibilities are provided to the highest of standards possible is probably the best way for the Council to contribute to improving educational attainment of disadvantaged and poor-performing children in their areas.

## RECOMMENDATION

The County Council, through the County Durham Local Area Agreement Interim Board and Children Trust arrangements, should ensure that the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan identify opportunities to improve educational attainment through regeneration initiatives to enable improved quality of life outcomes. This should reflect the importance of early years' intervention and parental support (family support strategies).

The County Council should ensure that, as part of its partnership approach to regeneration, adequate opportunities are put in place for children and young people to access healthy and nutritious food. For example, schools who do not have breakfast clubs should be encouraged to do so as part of a healthy schools initiative.

The County Council should support local schools, engage more closely with their communities so that they (schools) become an important part of community life.

- There is a definite need to invest in facilities and services for **pupils who are excluded or who have learning difficulties or who have behavioural problems.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The County Council should ensure that, at the very minimum, all of the seven IMPACT centres have appropriate IT facilities that contribute to a supportive learning environment.

The County Council should increase its investment in the academic mentor programme for Looked after Children. The programme aims to support pupils overcome learning and behavioural problems.

The County Council should undertake a review of the programme to assess what outcomes have been achieved before any investment options is considered.

The County Council should consider commissioning a pilot project looking at 'e-learning' focused on IMPACT centre's, Looked After Children and other vulnerable children, i.e. ill children. The purpose of this pilot would be to increase capacity for out-of-hours learning using on line teaching.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The County Councils Overview and Scrutiny function will systematic review progress on recommendations.  
That the first review for all working group reports is completed in 6 months time (December 07).