

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)

Foreword

- Cllr Alan Barker

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 21st 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 were 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 % of pupils achieving 5 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?

Project Terms of Reference and Membership of Working Group

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 were fully aware of the latest exam results (2006) that showed a 56.5% of pupils achieved 5 GCSE passes at A* - C grade which represents an increase of 12 percentage points over the last three years.

With this in mind the working group wanted to ensure that they were outcome focussed and would provide challenge by setting the following terms of reference that looks at the key themes that impact on improving better 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 does 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 directly 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.

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

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

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

The following councilors 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 Mrs M Robinson

Methodology

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 appendix1) 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 were 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 3 schools to observe the way “Aspirational Audits” were managed as part of the planned approach for school improvement. These meetings involved the County Councils Chief Inspector, Head of the Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT) , the Head Teacher and Departmental Heads.

Members visited 3 IMPACT centres and met with staff and pupils in these centres. This visit was facilitated by the Access Service of the Children and Young Peoples directorate.

Members visited Spenymoor 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.

What Is Key Stage 4?

The County Councils 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 results are GCSE exam results taken by 16 year olds. *(JD to add)*

KEY MESSAGES

- There is a clear need to celebrate our successes and in particular to note the value added (define).
- A positive development has been a partnership approach in working with schools.
- The evidence is overwhelming in that Leadership in schools, the belief that every child has potential can and does significantly contribute to educational attainment.
- 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 underachieve, enabling them to thrive in subject areas that capture their imagination.
- Directly related to a curriculum that is responsive and relevant 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 underachieve.
- 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 have a significant role to play in not only raising standards, but also in contributing to educational attainment and the schools success. All the head teachers we engaged in this process spoke very highly about the DCC’s Beyond Expectation Transformation Team (BETT), who have assisted them to strengthen areas of their curriculum through specialist’s 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 and initiatives that aim to address social inclusion. 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. 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)

KEY 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.
- Good clear leadership is important, and this has been assisted with the new regime of Children’s Services. The local authority role is about leadership, influence, challenge, co-ordination and support.

- 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 is only four below this level.
- In terms of value added as measured by Fischer Family Trust the Authority is in 13th percentile.
- 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 BETT have 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 service is catering for the needs of all of its children.
- 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.
- Monitoring and tracking poor performance and establishing additional support strategies for areas to be found most challenging. Monitoring in

schools on each pupils 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 in which course they would achieve better results thus enabling pupils to make their own choices.
- There is still at 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.
- 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.
- 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 the strengths and weaknesses and to identify best practice in each school. This review helped identify each schools needs. Initially schools viewed the process with trepidation but now there are excellent relationships with each school and they are now 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.

CONCLUSIONS

- 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.
- Leadership in schools and in the County Council is seen as the main driver 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. There is a need to have procedures in place to allow Head Teachers and Governors to resolve these issues and to be able to move forward.

- 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.
- 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
- Durham County Council has procedures in place to support Head Teachers deal with sickness absence and capability concerns.
- 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;
 - and a programme to provide extra support for 5-10 per cent of pupils in each school who were considered gifted or talented.

LEAs can have some positive impacts on pupil performance and attainment. Ofsted/Audit Commission (2002) found evidence of positive effects from **social inclusion strategies**. For example it was found that “in the most disadvantaged LEAs, 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 areas (for discussion)

1. Beyond Expectation Transformation Team- support for role/approach/with areas for development (note Beacon status success)
2. Post 16 challenge – develop action plan involving key stakeholders (teachers/governors/pupils)
3. Need to acknowledge the important issue of Leadership and in schools. Need to reflect performance issues/capability and available support to enable this to be effectively performance managed.
4. Personalised learning /alternative curriculum/monitoring/tracking/targetting –support for this approach that should be replicated across all schools for both underachievers and those children who are described as “gifted and talented”
5. The role of the family and the community in supporting educational attainment. Welcome the development of Parent Support Advisors and Family support strategies. Need to reflect the joined up-ness/coordination of investment going into this area for maximum impact.
6. Develop the Family Schools approach /network of schools that enable specialists/experts within schools to provide on going support. This is related to the notion of “twinning”.
7. The importance of Social Inclusion strategies that support young people back into “healthy 2 activity and enable them to progress through the life.
8. The role of the County Council to support regeneration activities in deprived communities to enable improved quality of life opportunities. Reflecting the importance of early years intervention and parental support. Building on initiatives that engage the school more in becoming closer to its community; with support for teachers/governors to enable them to be more active in their communities.
9. Support for academic learning mentors to support pupils overcome learning and behavioural problems
10. Support for IMPACT centres that deliver an improved learning environment.
11. Resource issues ??
 - To request the BETT to establish a support mechanism in line with its approach with key stage 4 for Post 16 learning. It is suggested that a proposal to determine the priorities for Post 16 learning with an associated action plan for how best to deliver on these priorities be developed.

Likely Cost £50K

- To support the work of the Copelaw Activity Team (CAT`s), Community Support Team and STEPs project through identified activity in schools delivered directly to children, young people and families in support of the rolling out of the Family Support Strategy.
- To identify support for officer time focused on senior leaders in schools to engage them in development of integrated services.

Likely Cost for both is £100,000.

This would be split notionally between the 5 Local Children's Board areas, although managed by schools that are active and part of the local Community.

- To support infrastructure costs to establish up-to-date IT facilities with broadband Internet access within all the Impact centres so that all young people have access to the Internet.

Likely Cost £ £30K

- To build on this with a pilot project looking at 'e-learning' focused on Impact centres, 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. To request the Head of Access to submit proposals in line with these recommendations for one-off funding.

Likely Cost £ 60K

- Continuation of the academic mentoring programme (Collingwood programme) for looked after children for the 07/08 year. To request the Head of Access to submit proposals in line with these recommendations for one off funding.

Likely Cost £ 20K to cover resources, expenses, celebration event and training for the next year.