

Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2 December 2015

Educational Attainment in County Durham



Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive, and Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director of Children & Adult Services

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to introduce a presentation to members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Educational Attainment in County Durham given to the committee by Phil Hodgson, Strategic Manager in Children and Adult Services.

Background

2. At its meeting on 25 June 2015, Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to add Educational Attainment to its work programme.
3. Over the last few years children and young people in County Durham have done exceptionally well in their educational attainment and bucked the national trend in many cases. Durham County Council's Education Department provides support and intervention, including intensive support for schools in most need, to ensure the best educational outcomes for children and young people in Durham.

Key Stage 2:

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

	2014		Provisional 2015	
	Durham	National	Durham	National
Level 4+	79	79	82	80
Level 4B+	67	67	71	69
Level 5+	22	24	25	24

6. Attainment levels across the local authority continue to be strong against national levels and the significant trend of improvement in Durham continues year on year.

Key Stage 4:

7. 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.
8. The table below shows 2015 Key Stage 4 outcomes, although these remain invalidated until later in the year.

	2014		Provisional 2015	
	Durham	National	Durham	National
% 5+ A*-C including Eng & Maths	57.6	56.6	54.6	56.1
% 3 levels progress - English	74	72	70	70
% 3 levels progress - Maths	60	66	61	67
% C+ English	72	69	68	68
% C+ Maths	67	68	67	68

9. As is clear from the headline figures, the overall percentage of children achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has fallen this year, highlighting issues with English in particular, although other key measures remain broadly in line with expectations. A number of secondary schools fared badly with entries to the iGCSE examination, a syllabus choice which has in the past served pupils well in terms of good results. An analysis of results has highlighted lower than expected marks on the Higher paper, Q1. Schools

affected have robust plans in place for the current year 11 cohort, and the local authority will monitor these closely wherever possible. English GCSE outcomes in Durham, however, remain above NE averages.

10. Outcomes in maths improved at a slower rate than anticipated in 2015, although this rate was the same as that nationally. Recent changes to the examination entry policy (now terminal examination rather than the inclusion of an element of coursework), are still having an impact in some schools. However, as with English, outcomes in Durham remain above NE averages.
11. The response of the Education Development Service has included the appointment of an outstanding head teacher to the new post of 'Lead Adviser Secondary Standards' within the local authority with the explicit brief to work with secondary head teachers of schools and academies and increase the level of support and challenge in this sector. This post holder will monitor action plans in relation to improving standards, particularly in maths and English, and take proactive steps where these are not meeting targets.

Academies - background

12. Academies are schools that are independent of direct accountability to local authorities. They are funded and directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. They have the ability to develop their own curriculum, change staff pay and conditions and school policies. They are still subject to regular Ofsted inspection, statutory testing (GCSE) and providing a broad based curriculum. Nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of academies and an expressed commitment by the government to convert many more schools to academies in future.
13. In County Durham there are 13 academy converter schools and two academy sponsor schools, 11 community schools, 3 Foundation schools and two voluntary aided schools.
14. In recent inspection reports Ofsted have criticised some converter academies for not promoting enough improvement and not being as effective as expected. National data does not yet provide a clear picture of whether academisation does broadly have a positive effect on results. However, a report by The Sutton Trust in July 2015, which looked at 34 multi-academy trusts (MATs), found that disadvantaged pupils at academies in 22 of them fell below the average for those in all maintained schools and academies. However, in 11 top-performing chains, disadvantaged pupils achieved above average results.

Academies – local context

15. Understanding that the Committee is especially interested to discover if the opening of converter academies had impacted on neighbouring schools in

relation to roll numbers, academic performance and the number of exclusions, an attempt has been made with available County data to determine whether or not any of these factors have been affected.

16. There is no available statistical evidence regarding academies opening and having an impact on neighbouring schools, either nationally or locally. To look into this further would require quite an involved piece of work as the converter academies in Durham have different opening dates and are spread across all key stages and school types. Even if differences in school performance could be identified it would be unsafe to link the academic performance of a school to the opening of a nearby converter academy as there are so many other factors to consider. Also, the sample size may not be large enough to make any statistically valid conclusions. This is the informed view of the Information Management & Data Services team.
17. There has been no measurable impact on roll numbers as a result of schools converting to become academies. While academies continue to permanently exclude children, the pattern of this is not worse than for maintained schools.
18. With few exceptions, the academies in Durham continue to hold a close relationship to the local authority, with staff attending briefings and networks (at appropriate charge), and in many cases taking out service level agreements for school improvement support. That said, as academies are inspected by Ofsted and some are deemed to be in the category of 'schools causing concern', the local authority has no automatic role in providing support, as it has with maintained schools.

Presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19. The presentation will focus on the following areas:
 - a. Key Stage 2 results
 - b. Key Stage 4 results
 - c. Key comparisons between Durham schools and academies in relation to exclusions and academic performance.

Recommendations

20. Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the information contained in the presentation and provide comment accordingly.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – none

Staffing - none

Risk - none

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – n/a

Accommodation – n/a

Crime and Disorder – n/a

Human Rights – n/a

Consultation – n/a

Procurement – n/a

Disability Issues – n/a

Legal Implications – n/a