

# **DIRECTOR'S PRIORITIES PAPER**

## **Delivering School Standards and Every Child Matters in Darlington**

## Appendix 2: Director's Priorities Paper

	Contents	
	Welcome – Cabinet Member Councillor Chris McEwan	4
1	Introduction	5
2	Our starting point – the published vision	6
3	Setting the context – background information	7
4	Setting the context – school information	9
5	Summary of performance data	10
6	National picture – understanding the distinct roles of schools and the local authority	15
7	Delivering effective services	16
8	Getting local authority and school relations right	17
9	The role of schools	18
10	Support for schools	19
11	Framework for monitoring, support, challenge and intervention	20
12	Communication and consultation	21
13	School improvement and Every Child Matters	21
14	Taking the agenda forward – responding to Head teachers	22
15	Support for the professional development of the school workforce	23
16	The quality of leadership provided by senior officers of the authority	23
17	The extent to which schools influence the local authority plans and procedures	24
18	How to make sense of the various work streams	24
19	Taking the work forward – Director's Commissions and succession planning	27
20	The importance of School Leadership for Every Child Matters	29
21	Creating a structure for the delivery of effective Children's Services – within the Council	32
22	Creating a Structure for the delivery of effective Children's Services – outside of the department	35
23	Conclusion	35
24	Appendices 1: A Champion for Every Child 2: Every Child goes to School 3: A Job or Place for Every School Leaver 4. Proposed Departmental Structure	

## **DIRECTOR'S PRIORITIES PAPER**

### **Delivering School Standards and Every Child Matters in Darlington**

#### **Welcome**

Darlington has an ambitious programme for Children's Services. Within 2 years we expect to have a 70% GCSE pass rate in the Borough and all schools scoring 50% plus. We want our schools to offer the best teaching in the North East and to encourage more young people to continue their education. We will secure funding to renew Branksome, Hurworth and Longfield Secondary Schools. We know that we have to work even harder to improve attendance figures through a revitalised approach to attendance and exclusion.

This Priorities Paper is a welcome tool in our strategy to achieve our aims. It sets in context what steps we must take to ensure that our children and young people are well served by our schools and achieve their potential. It is a strategy paper that stands along side our review of the Children and Young People's Plan and sets out in more detail how the ambitions in the review are to be met.



Cllr Chris McEwan  
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

## 1. Introduction

In 2006 the Local Strategic Partnership in Darlington published *Investing in Tomorrow*, the borough's first Children and Young People's Plan. The Plan was a comprehensive document, based on management information and on stakeholder engagement, and effectively demonstrated the links between the borough's Local Area Agreement and the priorities set by the Children and Young People's Plan. The Plan highlighted 7 broad areas where it was clear from the evidence that were priorities for action. The priorities covered:

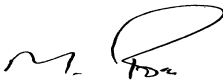
- Reducing rates of teenage pregnancy
- Improving the provision of information, advice and guidance
- Improving the stability of children's placements
- Reducing absences and exclusion from schools
- Improving academic progress for all children and young people
- Improving opportunities for the 14-19 age group; and
- Empowering children and young people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision-making and delivery of services.

These priorities have since be added to but, nevertheless, the continuing reform of children's services, the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the duty for all services to co-operate to promote children's well-being, means that schools share these priorities more than ever before.

It is a statutory requirement that the Children and Young People's Plan be reviewed annually and that the review be published. The 2007 review of the Plan coincides with the publication of the new Council Strategy and with the appointment of a new management team in Children's Services. The review was completed with reference to the revised national guidance, with reference to changing local needs and with a particular view to ensuring that strong links are made between school attainment and improving outcomes for children.

This strategy paper sets out high-level priorities for action in Darlington Children's Services over the next 3 years. The strategy builds upon the agreed priorities already established through the Local Area Agreement and the Children and Young People's Plan. What it adds is a more detailed delivery framework to promote sustainable improvements.

Ultimately, the work of a local authority Children's Services Department must be about promoting success for all and in doing must use the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes as reference points for action. However, the strategy describes a framework for delivering success for all and for promoting the 5 outcomes, which makes reference to a small number of propositions, which act as proxy indicators of progress against all 5 outcomes. This strategy paper is specifically focused on the role of schools and of the local authority in linking the Every Child Matters agendas with the school standards agenda. It should be read in conjunction with the Children and Young People's Plan Review.

  
Director of Children's Services

## 2. Our starting point – the published vision

Our vision for children's services in Darlington is based on the concept of keeping the child at the centre of all we do by providing integrated services, built around the child, the family and the community. The published vision is:

*'To improve the outcomes and maximise the life chances of all children and young people in Darlington by delivering effective, high quality, integrated services'*

In effect, this means delivering **success for all of Darlington's children and young people**. Turning this vision into a reality means improving outcomes on a sustainable basis, creating a whole systems approach which goes beyond the services delivered by the local authority and, in particular, strengthening universal services. The vision contains three distinct requirements – delivering services, which are effective, delivering services, which are of a high quality and moving towards more integration of services. This strategy deals with each of these three areas. The strategy also identified key actions for improvement.

It is important that the vision is revisited and refreshed, if necessary. The Children's Services Department in Darlington is now 2 years old and our collective knowledge of the task faced is considerably greater than it was in 2005, when the Department formed, or in 2006 when the first Children and Young People's Plan was produced. It was important to identify what has been learnt over those 2 years and what effect that learning has had on behaviours and actions, and, ultimately, on outcomes. It is also important to reflect on how we have made use of the increasing amount of data available to service planning.

National research has made it clear that the first round of Children and Young People's Plans were often ineffective at engaging schools and were equally ineffective at improving outcomes for specific vulnerable groups, such as Looked After Children and children with learning difficulties/disabilities. These issues are dealt with in the review of Darlington's Children and Young People's Plans.

In addition, it is expected that the significant investment in schools funding, combined with the development of Extended Schools and Children's Centres and the investment in workforce development would all contribute to improved outcomes. However, early findings from Sure Start and from the DfES national research into social deprivation and attainment showed that the additional funding was slow to make an impact on some of the more deprived communities. In Darlington, there are 11 target wards where action is being taken to close the gap between those wards and the more affluent parts of the town. In educational terms, at least, there is evidence that the gap is closing although the very poorest communities are still underachieving.

### **3. Setting the context – background information**

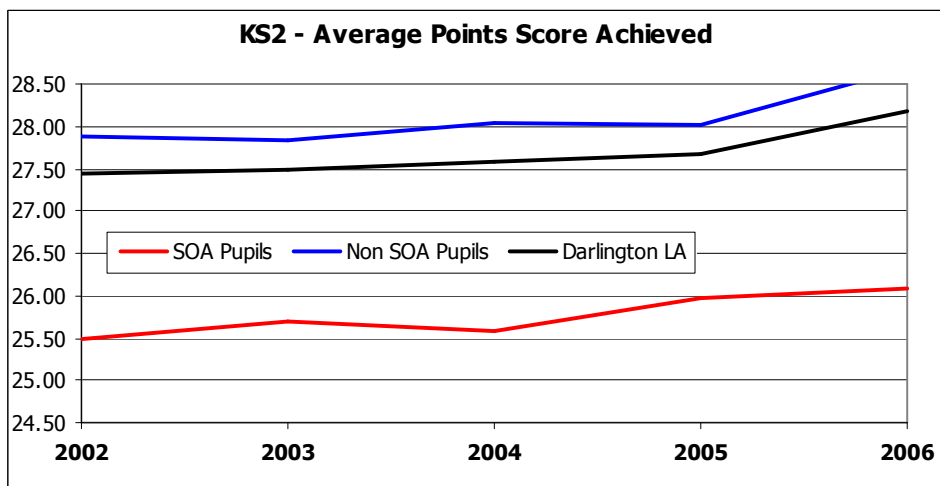
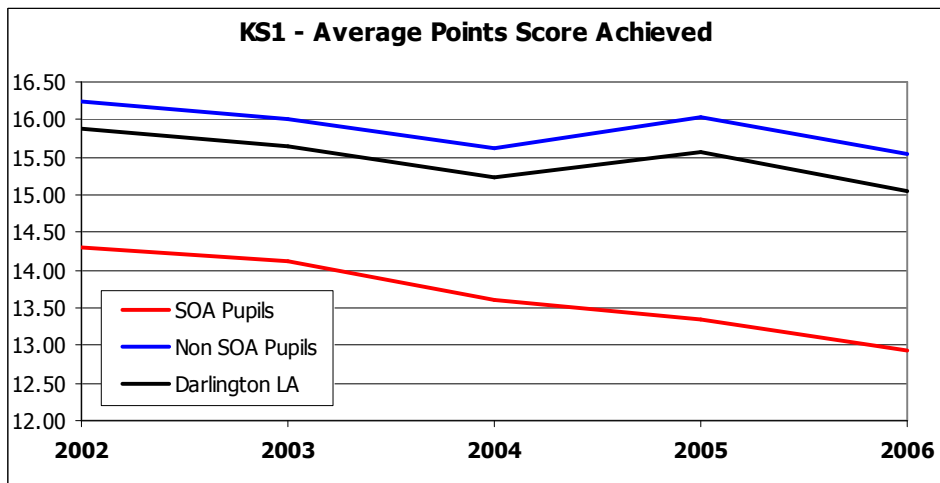
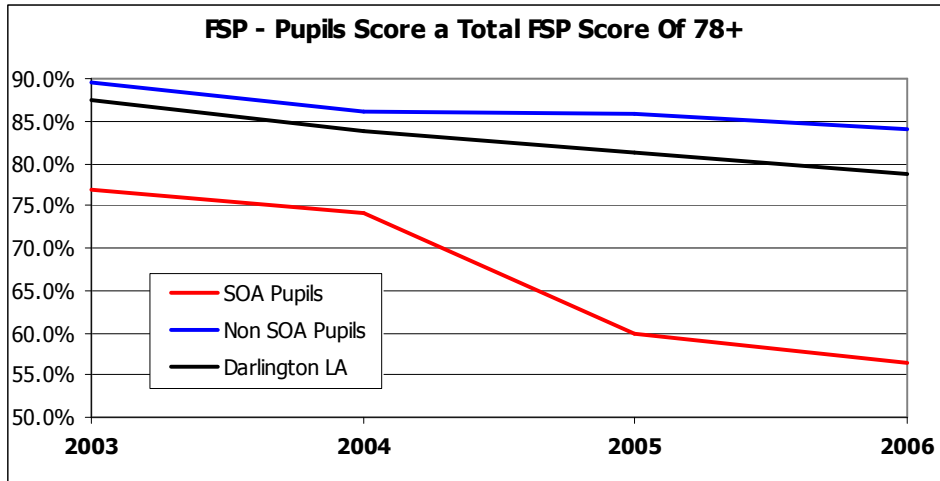
Darlington is the third smallest unitary authority and one of the poorest funded through national formulae. It is ranked as approximately the 90<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority and therefore just misses out on the key funds allocated to areas of significant deprivation. However, 9 super output areas across 6 wards in the borough are in the most deprived 10% nationally, and this raises challenges for the local authority and its partners. In addition, Darlington has a growing population of migrant workers and their families and has a Traveller community, which is 9 times the national average size.

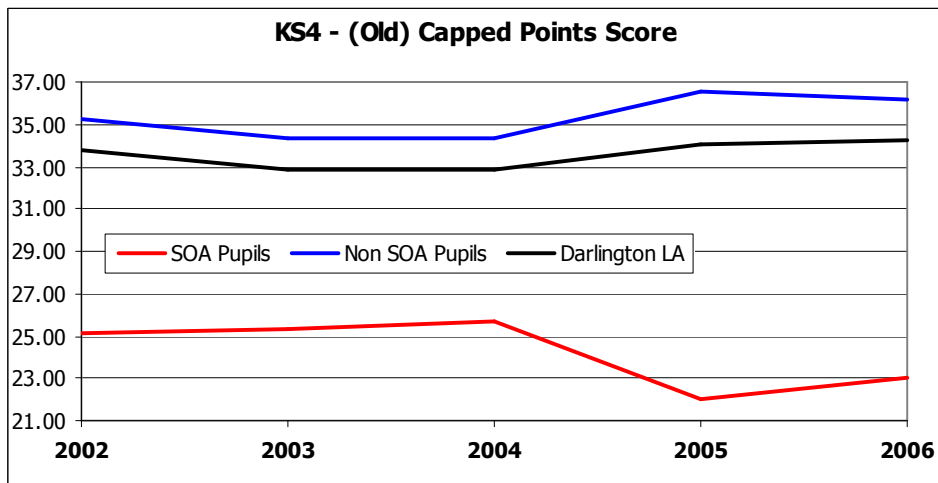
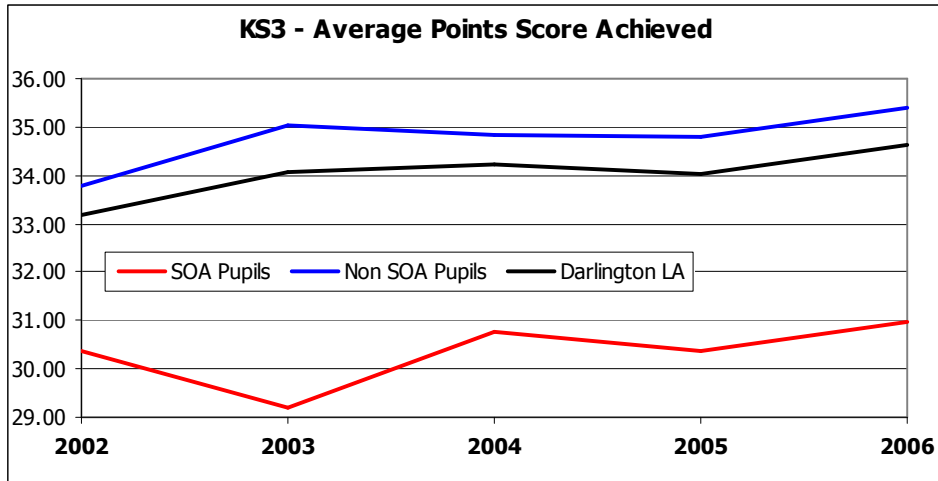
There is significant variation in performance and in indicators of well being between different areas within the Borough. For example, at ward level, youth unemployment varies between 1% and 34%. In one ward 90% of children live in low-income households and in another it is 14%. In parts of the Borough there is a current lack of positive peer role modelling around aspiration and ambition. In some wards there are very few, if any, successful university applications made and where between a quarter and a third of adults lack basic skills.

The Primary Care Trust data provided in the Business Plan 2007/08 notes high levels of childhood obesity (as measured in Year 6) at 20% (measured in 2006/07). There are also increasing levels of teenage pregnancy in young women aged 16 and under (05/06).

Darlington has one of lowest average weekly wage rates in County Durham and Tees Valley (earning on average £81 per week less than the national average) and unemployment rates are consistently higher (>2.5%) than the national average (2005).

National evidence suggests that recent improvements in school attainment levels have not impacted on the children and young people in the most deprived communities. There is an expectation that local authorities should be leading the partnerships which support the closing of the attainment gap between the 30% most deprived communities and the rest. This is the rationale behind the targeting of the 11 wards referred to, above. Data analysis of performance in this area in Darlington confirms that outcomes in Darlington for the 11 most deprived wards are increasing but further analysis shows that for the most deprived 10% of the school population their performance has not kept pace with that of their peers. This picture mirrors national performance. The graphs set out below record that for each Key Stage the performance for the most deprived pupils continues to lag well behind that of their less deprived peers. On each graph the red line represents the poorest 10% of the population (as measured by residing in the poorest super output areas [SOA]), the black line the Darlington total performance and the blue line the performance of the 90% of the children not in the poorest SOAs.





The starting point for this strategic paper, therefore, is that there is no room for complacency and that the local authority, all partners, and schools in particular, must seek to understand more about current performance and ways of gaining improvements. We must all be aware that the year on year improvements in standards at each Key Stage masks an underlying underperformance for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

#### **4. Setting the context – school information**

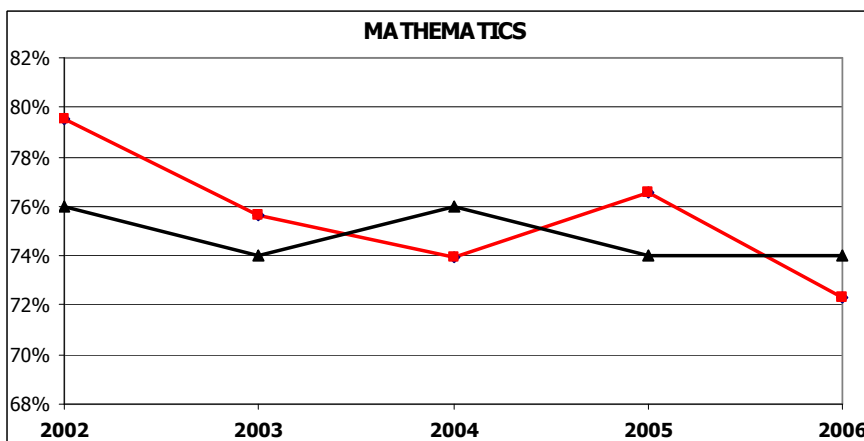
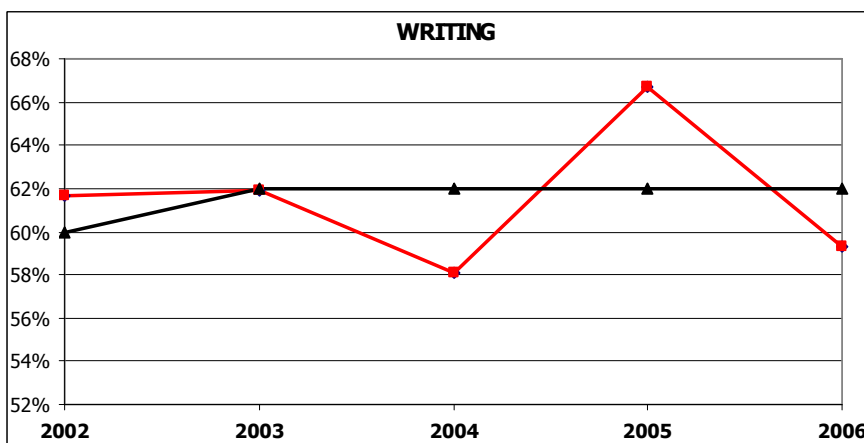
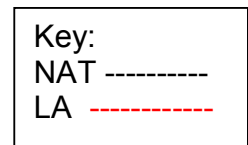
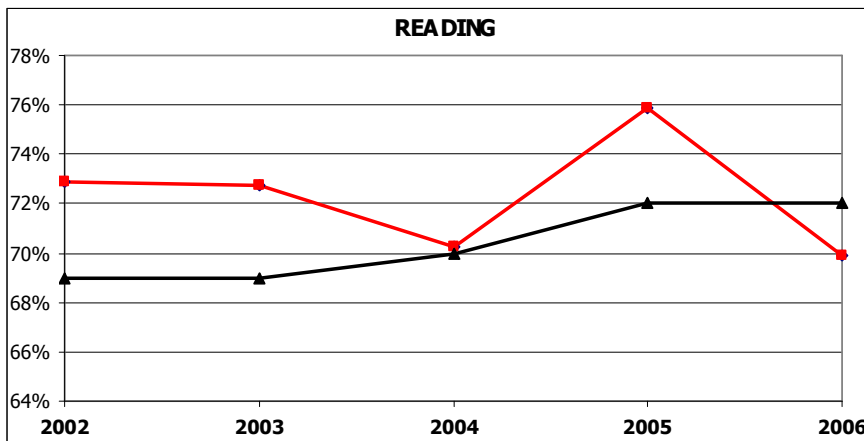
The local authority has recently introduced the School Condition Document (SCD). This provides a colour-coded snapshot of the current performance of each school, based on a broad and pertinent set of indicators. Using the SCD, most primary schools perform well in general and some secondary schools perform well. However, some schools under perform and it is the role of the local authority to provide challenge to these schools and to broker effective support for them.



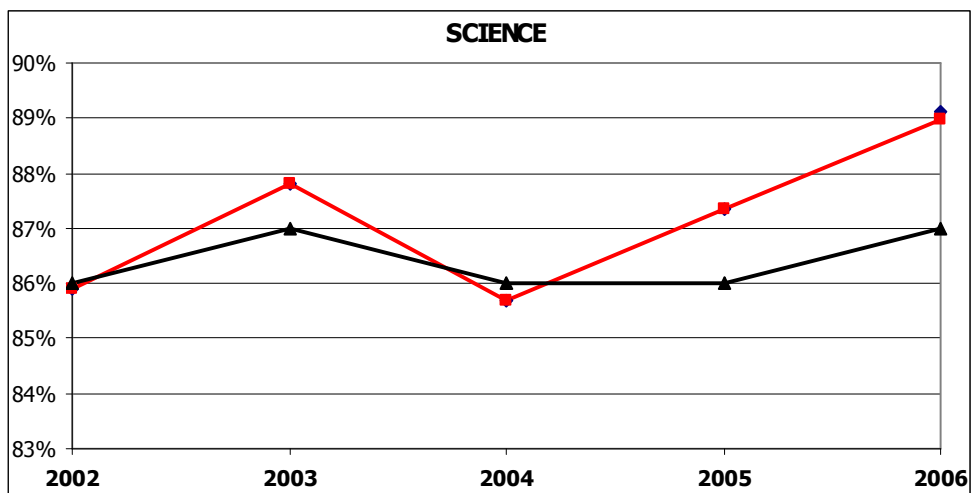
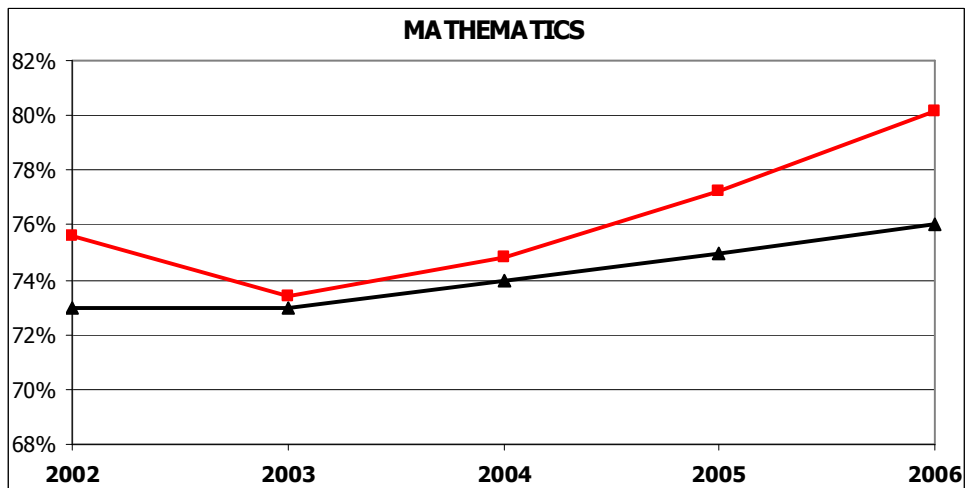
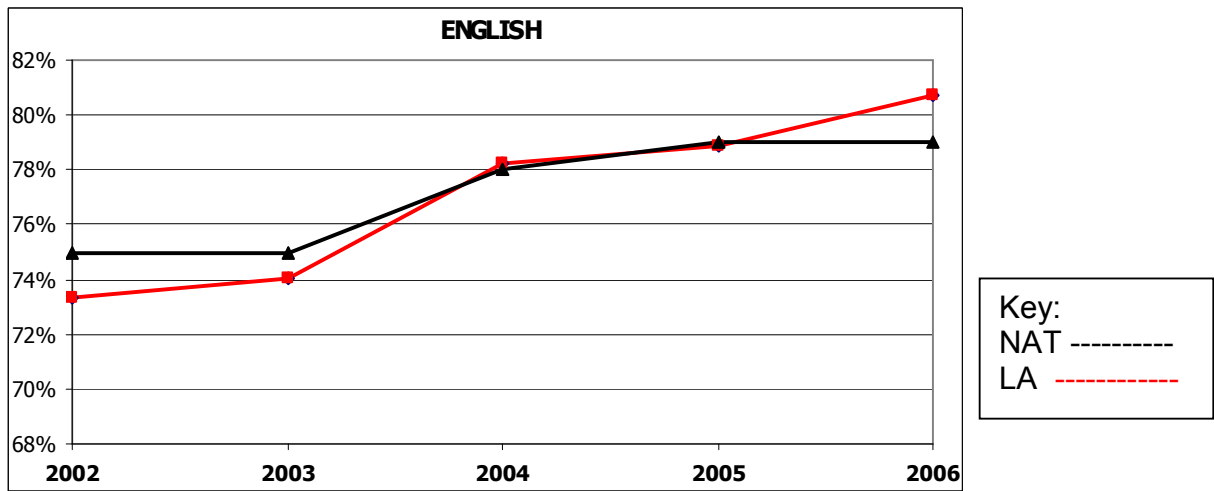
School performance impacts upon outcomes for children and an analysis of key performance data gives a good indicator of how well we are serving our children and young people. Our first task, therefore, is to assess how well we are currently performing at each Key Stage and in other key indicators of children's well-being:

## 5. Summary of Performance Data

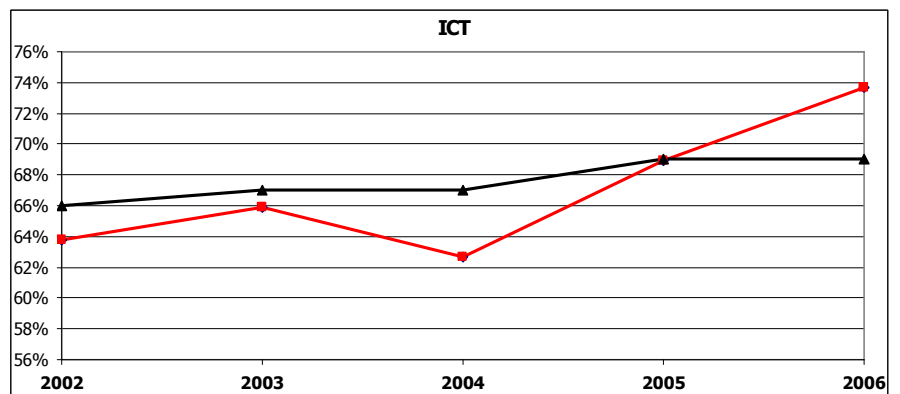
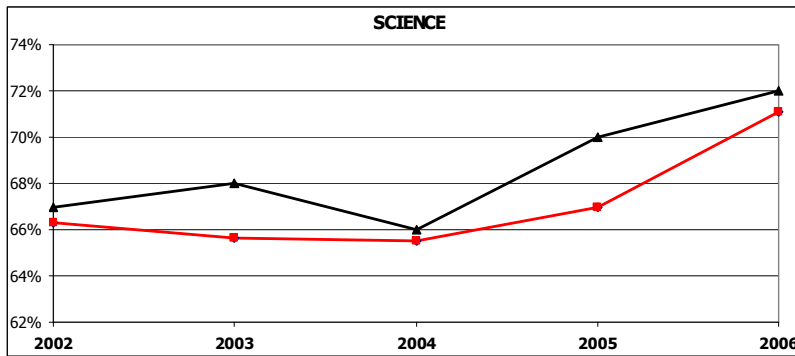
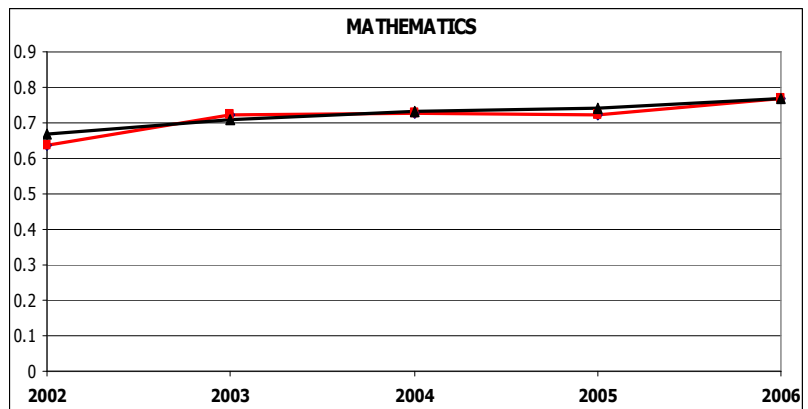
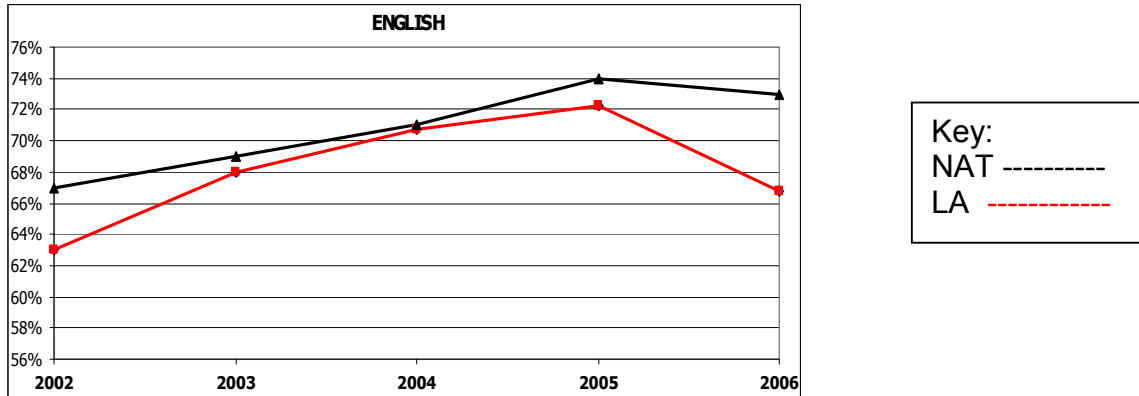
Performance at Key Stage 1 (percentage of children achieving Level 2+) dipped in 2006 and fell below national average, compared to 2005 when results were better than the national average.



Key Stage 2 performance is better than national average, with particular strengths in Mathematics.

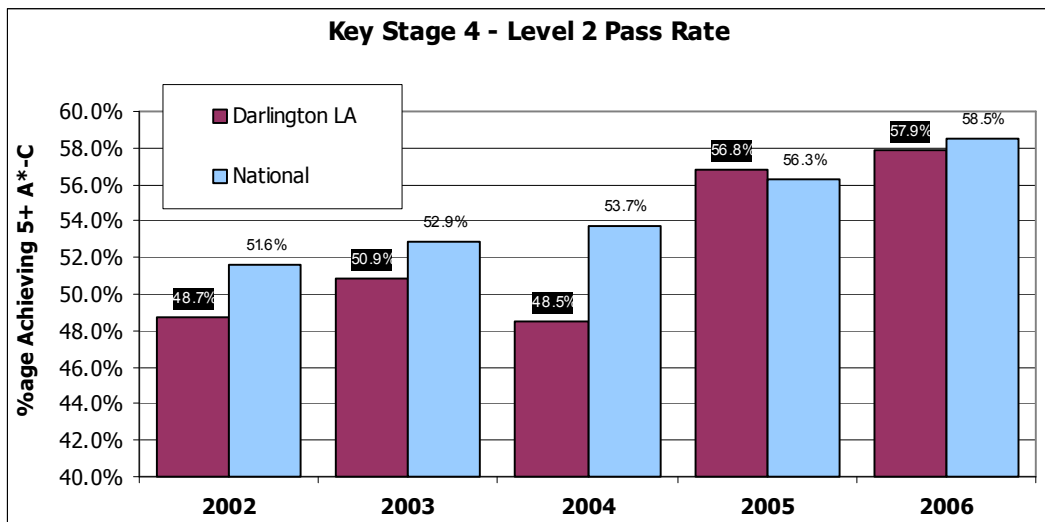


Key Stage 3 results are relatively poor and progress over the last 5 years has generally not kept up with national progress.

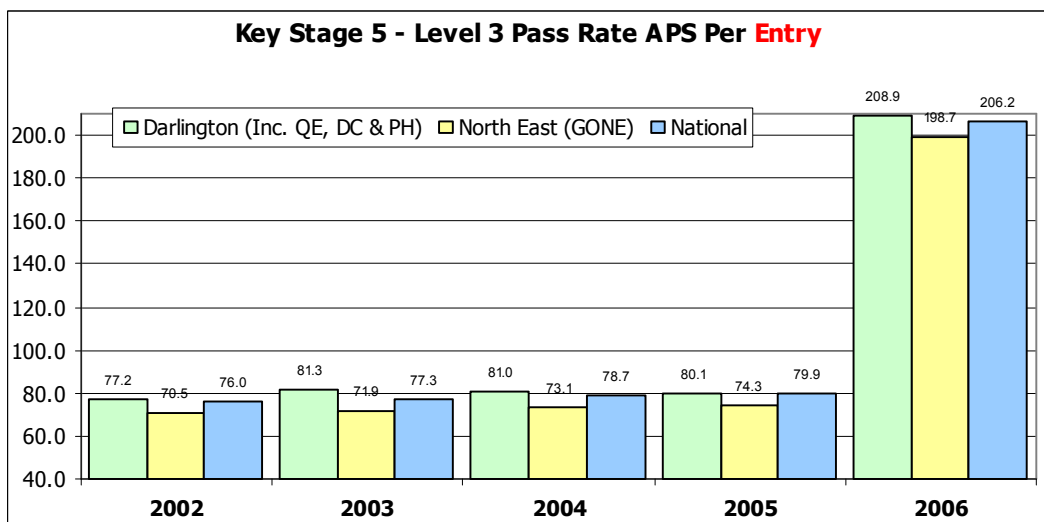


**Key Stage 4:**

At Key Stage 4 the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A\*- C grades is around the national average – although ranked 61<sup>st</sup> as a local authority, but there is a significantly larger percentage of the cohort achieving no passes compared to national figures. The value added performance between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in Darlington is very poor.



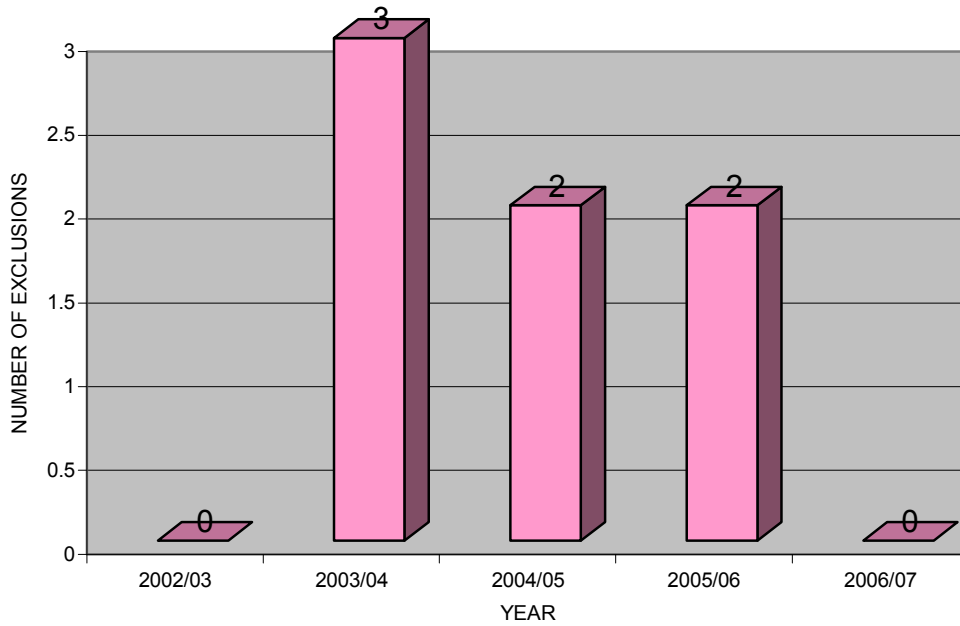
At Key Stage 5 performance is excellent, with the Borough being ranked as 11<sup>th</sup> best nationally. \*\*



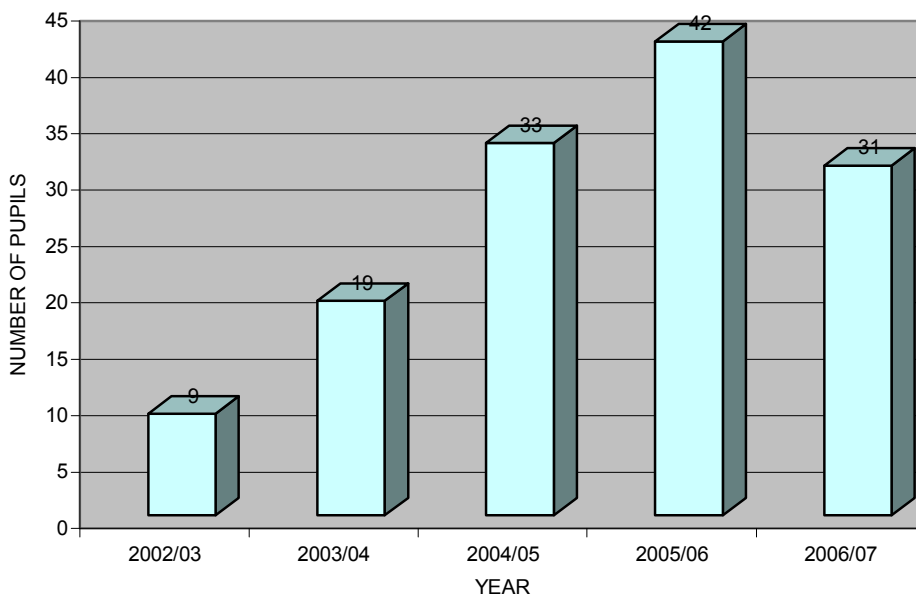
[\*\* From 2006, the range of qualifications reported for Post-16 was extend to include all Level 3 qualifications approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000). In order to do so, the new QCA tariff for level 3 qualifications was adopted.]

Not surprisingly, given some of the attainment concerns, exclusions and absenteeism are higher than national average. Darlington has the 7<sup>th</sup> worst absence rate in the country and performance is declining. Exclusions run at twice the national average and in 2006 a quarter of all Darlington secondary pupils were excluded at some point in the year.

### PRIMARY PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS



### SECONDARY PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS



Head teachers' evidence to the Local Strategic Partnership is very clear in stating that schools alone cannot overcome some of the barriers to achievement and that for those children and families in the most deprived communities a concerted, joint effort is required in order to make any impact at all.

The aim of this strategy is to align the school standards agenda firmly with the Every Child Matters agenda, which will lead to improvements in all 5 outcomes. The work done by schools to raise standards will be supported by wider efforts to intervene with children, families and communities where there is disadvantage.

The strategy is about the 5 outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. These are not outcomes, which can be delivered by schools and the local authority alone. The strategy paper looks at the contribution of other agencies and services to delivering the outcomes and to the integration of services wherever appropriate.

## **6. National picture – understanding the distinct roles of schools and the local authority**

Self-managing schools have the particular responsibility for raising educational achievement. The Education Act 2002 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 have increased the opportunity for schools to develop individual characteristics and ethos. However, the autonomy that schools appear to have does not mean that there is any benefit in isolation and there is an increasing emphasis on collaboration and partnerships between schools, such as over behaviour and through the Leading Edge schools initiative.

Local authorities have a responsibility to guarantee an infrastructure of a universal school system, with a widening choice of schools, and in promoting high educational standards. Local authorities can drive change but only with the engagement of schools and other partners. Darlington local authority delivers:

- vision, leadership and advocacy, in partnership with others;
- strategies to raise achievement linked with those to promote community development;
- support for networks of schools and learning communities to share best practice;
- monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- advice and support and the brokerage of services;
- a capital strategy, and
- direct services such as transport and SEN.

In particular, the local authority leadership is committed to supporting collaboration to deliver:

- strong communities of schools in the 5 clusters
- curriculum enrichment opportunities for all
- increased participation post 14 and post 16
- networking to promote school effectiveness
- efficient use of resources
- leadership development at all levels; and
- strong school self-evaluation

## **7. Delivering effective services**

As well as the standard functions listed above, we believe that the local authority has another role to play in supporting school standards and Every Child Matters. In order to be an effective local authority we must be responsive to local needs, in order to be able to influence the outcomes expected in delivering success for all. In 2006 schools in the Borough did not believe that the local authority was being as responsive to needs as it should be and signalled their concerns through the Audit Commission survey. There are 3 ways in which schools should be able to assess the responsiveness of the local authority in delivering services and in brokering others.

The first meaning of responsive is about 'being sensitive'. It is about being aware of the needs that schools have and being able to respond to them appropriately by providing high quality services. An example of this would be the development of improved communication and consultation procedures. An agreed system ensures that the local authority is able to evaluate the quality of its services and is able to adjust them to respond to the needs of schools.

A second meaning of responsive is about being 'alert' or 'fast moving'. In this context, it is about being aware of what is happening in schools and being quick to intervene where necessary. For Darlington, this means having the local capacity to provide support, when required. An example of this is the process of deploying School Improvement Partners, through to the development of the Darlington school condition document and the support we can subsequently offer schools.

The third sense in which the word is being used introduces the idea of being 'in touch', attuned to the wider agenda for schools, both as it is being shaped by changes in society and as it is directly influenced by the formation of policy within local and central government.

The Local Authority has a role to play in delivering the national priorities but also in promoting key local initiatives. Absolutely central to this is the belief in 'success for all', which, in practice, translates into a commitment to high quality teaching and learning as the only basis for raising standards that can be sustained in the long term.

## **8. Getting local authority and school relations right**

Schools have formal mechanisms through which to feedback information about local authority services and a key mechanism is the Audit Commission's annual survey of schools' views of their local authority. This is a national survey and allows comparisons of service quality to be made over time and between authorities. The Audit Commission survey in 2006 provided a key feedback to the local authority. Although only a minority of schools completed the survey, and schools have reported more positive views since, the survey indicated that the local authority needed to re-establish some key criteria for its work to support success for all.

In particular, accountability has to be explicitly recognised and built into the system of governance and relationships between schools and the local authority. The relationships should be described in explicit and formal agreements. There are some basic principles of partnership that are worth listing here that should be applied in Darlington. These are:

- we all share responsibility for the progress and well-being of all learners;
- we promote lifelong learning;
- we believe that collaboration adds value to schools and communities;
- we are committed to collaborating to overcome the barriers to educational achievement, emotional health and economic well-being;
- we are committed to working in partnership with other agencies, employers, parents and the voluntary sector;
- schools are primarily responsible for their own performance;
- the local authority should support schools based on needs;
- we should all try to improve upon our previous best;
- we should celebrate success, share best practice and recognise all forms of achievement;
- we will develop leadership at all levels;
- our provision should be high quality and value for money; and
- relationships should be based on mutual trust and transparency

If there is general acceptance of these principles then there is a firm basis for ensuring that there is unanimity of purpose between schools and partners.



## 9. The role of schools

Darlington, like most other local authorities, consists of a variety of schools, which enjoy different relationships to the local authority and to each other. Because of the variety it is worth gaining general agreement around the commonality of responsibilities that rest with schools, in order to complement the description of the role of the local authority.

In describing successful schools, we need a language, which captures all of the positive features of being a self-managing school, but does not carry the negative ones of isolation and independence. We need a language which is being about being confident, secure and self-reliant, but which also recognises a wider set of responsibilities that go beyond the immediate interests of the individual school. A starting point for this language is around the phrase the 'responsible school'. Schools must be responsible not only for themselves, but for others as well and where autonomy acquires a broader social and moral purpose. This is the model of responsibility found in all of the most successful educational systems and the model promoted through the works of innovators such as Michael Fullan and the National College of School Leadership.

The definition of a responsible school that is closest to the idea of being autonomous is one, which stresses the importance of schools *taking* responsibility for themselves, of being managerially self-sufficient. The hallmarks of a school that has successfully taken responsibility for shaping its own destiny are:

- a strong and distinctive sense of purpose
- the capacity to innovate
- a powerful collective ethos that is shared by all staff
- high quality planning that is financially sound
- a stubborn refusal to allow the socio-economic background of pupils and resources (or the lack of them) to become an obstacle to progress.

We are fortunate in having a number of these schools already in Darlington. In addition, the High Force programme and HELM are both locally led initiatives, which are driven by this definition of responsibility.

What an exclusive emphasis on "autonomy" misses however, is the importance of being responsible for others, of *carrying* responsibility. It fails to set the school within a wider social context or to see it as part of a children's service provided by and for the community as a whole. The hallmarks of a school that is willing to carry its share of a wider responsibility are:

- a willingness to be inclusive and to embrace the Every Child Matters agenda,
- extended schooling,
- a strong sense of partnership with children, their parents, and the community – particularly through Children's Centres
- an appreciation that 'education' is about more than schooling

- active involvement with other schools and the wider learning community.

Essentially, carrying responsibility is about schools knowing how to fit into the bigger picture and fulfilling their part in it.

The final definition is perhaps the most familiar one. It is about 'being responsible', in the sense of being accountable or being *held* responsible. The hallmarks of a school that is fully accountable are:

- acceptance of the standards agenda
- an appreciation that raising standards is not just about academic performance
- genuine ownership of targets to drive work in individual classrooms as well as in the school as a whole
- a strong relationship between the governing body and the staff employed by the school
- regular use of internal and external audit to drive school improvement, including recognising the role of the governing body to challenge the Head teacher
- an active commitment to rigorous self evaluation
- an intelligent use of the school's Self Evaluation Form

Being held responsible should be seen as a way for the teaching and wider school profession to assert that raising standards and improved outcomes for all children and young people are indivisible.

## **10. Support for schools**

Schools having greater self sufficiency does not mean a reduction in the extent to which schools might need support from the local authority. It is not the case that if you give schools more responsibility, Head teachers require less support in their role. It is much more likely that the opposite is the case and that Head teachers need more support to deal with the plethora of new responsibilities, which have come their way. If Head teachers don't get support from the local authority there is likely to be an increased difficulty in recruiting Head teachers because of the perceived strains they operate under.

The local authority can play a key role in management support, policy development, advice and guidance. These roles go along side the need to monitor pupil performance and challenge schools. As new policies come into force, the local authority should take the lead in providing Borough-wide advice for schools, with model policies and procedures. This is about being a responsive local authority, providing leadership. There must be agreement about the standards that are currently being achieved in schools and a shared view of what might be possible. The School Condition document will help us to do this. The local authority must help Head teachers and governors to reflect on how their school might develop and this, in turn, requires a system by which information and best practice can be shared. This is also about being a

responsive local authority, providing leadership. There must also be support for succession planning for the authority as a whole by being knowledgeable about the qualities of individual teachers.

In drawing up this section of the strategic paper which is about the relationship with schools, it is proposed that priority be given to the two areas already highlighted:

- *A new approach to the work of School Improvement Officers* to ensure that schools receive appropriate support.
- *A fresh approach to consultation with schools.* There is a need to be clearer about the timetable for consultation, the role of the new schools forum, the link between consultation with Head teachers and with chairs of governing bodies and the place of consultation with young people themselves.

## **11. Framework for monitoring, support, challenge and intervention**

The local authority and schools have agreed the use of the School Condition Document. This must now be backed up by a system to monitor performance, which relates directly to strategies for support and intervention. The proposed system is summarised, below and schools will be consulted about its implementation.

In the same way that schools and the LA should have appropriate systems for communication and consultation between one another, they should also have a clearly defined system for monitoring school performance. This system or framework should set out the roles and responsibilities of all concerned with school improvement in its widest sense and should include detail in relation to the involvement of:

School Improvement Partners (SIPs) will hold a 'single conversation' with Head teachers about school performance, the results of which will be reported to the Local Authority, Head teacher and school governors. The Local Authority will provide every school in Darlington with a SIP from September 2007 onwards. They will spend up to five days in each academic year on work related to each school.

Lead Improvement Officers (LIOs) will provide the day-to-day link between SIPs and the Local Authority helping the Head teacher to broker support and appropriate intervention for school improvement where necessary. Their involvement in schools will be proportionate to the needs of the school as agreed between the SIP, the school and the Local Authority School Condition Group.

The School Condition Group will meet termly, considering all relevant data and information for all schools e.g. school condition document, test results (RAISE online, Fischer Family Trust), SIP reports, LIO involvement etc. They will then suggest intervention proportionate to a school's need commissioned from the

most appropriate source. This could include National Strategy workers/consultants from within the LA or externally brokered partners. They will make reference to the Local Authority policy for Schools Causing Concern when necessary.

## **12. Communication and consultation**

In order to refresh the relationship between the Local Authority and schools, representative Head teachers drawn from all phases of the school system have proposed a new structure for communication and consultation. Schools will be consulted over its implementation.

In drawing up this section of the strategic paper which is about the relationship with schools it is proposed that priority be given to the three areas already highlighted:

- *A new approach to the use of the School Condition Document* to ensure that schools receive appropriate support.
- *A new approach to the work of School Improvement Officers* to ensure that schools receive appropriate support.
- *A fresh approach to consultation with schools.* There is a need to be clearer about the timetable for consultation, the role of the new schools forum, the link between consultation with Head teachers and with chairs of governing bodies and the place of consultation with young people themselves.

## **13. School improvement and Every Child Matters**

Much thinking about school improvement in the decade after the introduction of the national curriculum concentrated attention on the school in isolation, ignoring the relationship with the wider community. That changed in the last five years and has changed dramatically since the publication of Every Child Matters. There is widespread acceptance now that the performance of pupils in a school is, at least in part, determined by the nature of the community they come from and that schools have an important role to play in raising expectations and aspirations in those communities.

Every Child Matters and the Children's Act 2004 led to a great deal of fresh thinking about the way in which schools need to relate both to each other and to other public and private sector organisations. Three aspects of this new approach are particularly striking:

- Multi-agency working, at school as well as LA level, is seen as a way of solving problems for individual people that remained intractable when they were separately addressed by social services, or health or education;
- The pressure on schools to tackle social and educational exclusion stems partly from a belief in social justice, but is also driven by economic self-interest. Greater social cohesion will lead to a reduction in crime and an increase in community safety; and

- Schools are increasingly thriving in their role as centres for extended learning and support in the community.

The action that is required to achieve this vision builds on what has already been achieved in Darlington. In drawing up a Strategic Plan, it is proposed that priority be given to:

- Reviewing the work of partnership bodies such as the Children's Trust and the Connexions Local Management Committee to ensure that there is added value from the partnership approach.
- The introduction of a new approach to 14-19 education, using the local 14-19 Trust as a way of bringing all secondary schools together with the colleges and training providers to increase the range of vocational options available to young people in the Borough; and
- The development of the policy on locality working, refocusing the work of the services to embrace a more direct link with schools where this does not already exist.

#### **14. Taking the agenda forward – responding to Head teachers**

In January 2007 Head teachers agreed with the local authority the evidence-based issues, which were priorities for action within the Borough. These priorities were:

- improving the local authority's knowledge about Darlington schools
- the development of the workforce
- the quality of leadership of local officers; and
- the engagement of schools in setting key priorities and in developing key strategic plans

The local authority knowledge of school needs and its challenge and support for school improvement.

In order to be an effective local authority and one, which can contribute to the raising of standards for all children and young people, the local authority must have effective working knowledge of the performance of its schools. This knowledge is gained partly through statistical data but in order to deliver support over and above that which stems from published data, it must be backed up with local knowledge and current performance issues. It is about being responsive as a local authority before annual performance data is published.

The evidence that the local authority was performing less well than expected in this area came from the Audit Commission survey in June 2006 – and assessed annual performance to that date. It has already been reported, above, that the local authority has taken steps to address this concern. The School Condition Document has become embedded and the local authority has recruited key staff, including an Assistant Director for Schools and Standards.

There are 4 further actions planned. These are:

- to develop the School Condition Document into a tool that allows the local authority to provide early support (see above);
- the setting up of a team of school improvement officers skilled to support school development planning and capable of supporting schools in challenging circumstances (see above);
- ensuring that the School Improvement Partners are properly trained to deliver in Darlington;
- building capacity in areas of developing work, such as the 14-19 agenda and in developing a skilled workforce for the Darlington economy (see above)

### **15. Support for the professional development of the school workforce**

This is an absolutely critical area for work in Darlington and one where Head teachers need support from the local authority. There will be a Head teacher recruitment crisis nationally in the next few years and Darlington will suffer as much as anywhere else. Building on existing best practice and local arrangements – which are sound but which do not encompass all schools - we will institute a Darlington Schools Leadership Programme. This will be a comprehensive programme covering newly qualified teachers (NQTs) through to Head teachers and governors. The National College for School Leadership is very supportive of this aim. Our ambition is that this activity will be seen as best practice in the region and will, more importantly, ensure that our NQTs stay with us, that our Heads of Department or Key Stages can take the step to become Deputies and that our Deputies can become our next generation of Heads. Faced with a national shortage of high calibre Heads we must do everything we can to both grow our own and retain those we already have. We see this programme as being a joint investment between the local authority and schools. This is an example of schools taking responsibility and for the local authority to be responsive. Schools would have key roles in determining the programme and the local authority would invest in the capacity to manage the programme.

The key action planned is focusing on support for school development and leadership. Wherever possible, we wish to support the locally developed schemes such as HELM and those around raising boys' attainment and assertive mentoring.

### **16. The quality of leadership provided by senior officers of the authority**

We need to demonstrate our role in raising standards and in safeguarding children by having robust procedures in place to deliver both support and challenge. In addition, the authority staff must fulfil their leadership role in terms of providing high quality and timely advice and must be seen to be making effective use of data to determine their priorities. The leadership must be demonstrated by the agendas set for Head teacher meetings, through to the quality of support provided by individual officers on every school and family visit.

The issue of quality cannot wholly be separated from quantity. The local authority must have sufficient high quality staff in post to support the priorities established in this paper.

### **17. The extent to which schools influence the local authority plans and procedures**

The new guidance on Children and Young People Plans say that we must consult with schools about the review of the Plan and that schools must have regard to the Plan in school improvement planning. This has been identified as an area of weakness nationally but one that might be exacerbated in Darlington because of previously uncertain arrangements for communication and consultation. Improving these arrangements will help to address this issue, as will clarifying the role of the Schools Forum and the Local Admissions Forum.

A key action is here is to ensure the communication procedure being developed (see above) can be used by schools to influence local authority plans and procedures.

### **18. How to make sense of the various work streams**

Any strategic paper that is over 30 pages long is going to be full of detail and sometimes when there are so many things to do it is worth trying to describe them in simple terms, in a language that is understood by everybody so that Heads and governors have sections of the paper that they can refer members of the public to when they ask what is going on in terms of linking school standards with Every Child Matters.

It is important that we recognise the implications of the agenda set by Every Child Matters. There is a challenge in ensuring that all children benefit from the provision made, that all are kept safe, that all achieve their potential and so on. Schools and the local authority need to work together to keep the child at the centre, ensuring that individual needs are met by:

- joint working across all agencies serving a school community;
- working with the wider community to ensure that children are safe; and
- providing advocacy, effective admissions arrangements and timely support for SEN and complex needs

There are three challenges faced by schools and services in Darlington. If we can meet these challenges then we can guarantee that we are doing everything to ensure that children and young people achieve their potential, that we deliver success for all.

Schools now have a duty to co-operate with other agencies to promote the well-being of children and young people. This duty carries with it responsibilities for schools to understand and operate the developing framework for promoting well-being, such as the Safeguarding Board, ContactPoint and the Common Assessment Framework. This is a good starting point to describe the first key

challenge for us in Darlington – the idea of *A Champion for Every Child*. First and foremost this is about saying that parents and carers are responsible for bringing up their children and that they should be supported in doing this.

In some cases this support is delivered at a universal level, through the provision of high quality maternity care and the provision of child care places, through a choice of schools being available and the prompt payment of benefits. There will be times, however, when parents require some targeted support or intervention. It may be that parents will require additional anti-natal support. For other parents it might be during the ‘terrible twos’ or during the equally terrible teenage years. It is about keeping families together, with the skills necessary to bring up children safely, and it is not about blaming parents.

We will only know that some children or young people are causing concerns if we recognise that all adults who come in to contact with children and families understand that they have a monitoring role to play in assessing how well parents are coping and how well children are developing. At some point, virtually every parent places the well-being of their child in the hands of other adults – whether with childminders, nurseries, schools or youth groups. Every one of these adults working with children and young people must champion them when they need help. If someone sees a child having a difficulty, they will do something about it. That is the role of Early Years workers, of class teachers, of subject teachers, of Personal Advisers. Those staff are fulfilling roles that are better described now in the core competencies for the children’s workforce and the recently developed joint statement of principles agreed by the General Teaching Council, the General Social Care Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Council. It is about putting the child or young person at the centre of the work we do. It is about preventing failure. If a child hasn’t eaten school dinners for two days or if they squint from the back of the class, if they are alone in the playground or if they have not achieved the predicted grades, we do something about it. It might be the class teacher, the SENCO, the Head or a support worker but we do something about it. Outside of schools, the same rules apply to childminders, to Health Visitors, to Youth Workers and so on. Parents welcome the knowledge that when they hand their children over to professionals, they know that the professionals will champion the child or young person as if they were their own and will not knowingly tolerate failure to thrive.

Services such as health visitors, social workers and youth offending staff may all have to intervene to protect and safeguard children and young people and this may not always be with parental support but is a role that a responsible and responsive system requires. This is specialist work and only applies to a very small minority of children and young people each year but it might be an even smaller number each year if we ensured that the targeted, preventative services were working effectively.

To fulfil this it means that everyone needs to know about the Every Child Matters agenda. Staff need to track and record progress and they need to know how and when to share information if they think that a child or young person requires



additional support. We need to train staff in using the common assessment framework and we have to ensure that the ContactPoint system works.

The second thing we must do is to make sure that *Every Child goes to School*. This is the best proxy indicator we can use to determine the success of our interventions and to measure the likely outcomes for children and young people. Data in Darlington tells us that many families have a limited expectation of ensuring that their children attend school regularly and that absenteeism rates are higher than expected amongst 5 year olds (twice the rate of primary absenteeism in the Borough). Attendance improves through the subsequent primary school years but we must address the issue of school absenteeism in such young children.

National evidence already tells us why some children may stay away from school. Reasons include bullying, inappropriate curriculum, caring for sick relatives, witnessing domestic violence, abuse, sexual exploitation, exclusion or because they have a mental health need. If children improve their attendance at school then we know that we have reduced the frequency, intensity or duration of the difficulties they face.

This aspect is obviously linked to the notion of a champion for every child. If we design services to prevent the development of concerns, or act promptly to intervene as soon as a concern is recorded, then we are likely to improve attendance. The joint Treasury and DfES report '*Aiming high for children: supporting families*', makes clear the detrimental impact of family, health and social problems on future school attendance. What is clear from all research findings is that tackling attendance concerns is not simply a school issue. Whilst schools can and do make a difference, and make the biggest difference where they exercise their responsibility to not accept failure and challenge the poverty of ambition, the complex needs of some children and families makes it essential that services work together.

The final thing that we do is try to make sure that there is *a job or a place for every school leaver* – ensuring that every 16-18 year old is in education, employment or training. In order to get every school leaver into a job, education or training means they have to be safe from harm, literate and numerate to the best of their ability, in their best possible health, they have to be socially skilled, free from offending and drugs, they must have recognised and accredited qualifications, they must be emotionally intelligent and with some sense of ambition and aspiration.

This aspect is the culmination of the *champion* and *attendance* issues. Transition into adulthood needs to be positive. All transitions can be points of potential failure and the transition to adulthood is no different. The development of targeted youth support teams is very clearly about multi-agency teams using information sharing to identify vulnerable young people and then putting schemes in place to ensure that they are supported. For some young people, their needs are so complex, even if they are temporary, that no single agency is configured to meet their needs and so services have to be designed around the service user.

Each of these three key challenges must permeate all of the work that we do. This means that they become a feature of our work at each of the 3 tiers of provision and for particularly for each of the groups we identify as being vulnerable.

Each of the three key ideas described above is underpinned by the same requirement. In order to deliver effective services, adults need to be knowledgeable about the services on offer, about the sorts of needs young people can face and about the boundaries between acceptable and risky behaviour. Young people have made it clear that they know that they benefit from knowledgeable adults. That links back to the need for investment in training for the workforce.

Diagrammatic representations of each of the three areas are set out as Appendices 1-3. These are intended to illustrate how the 3 key ideas link diverse service activity.

## **19. Taking the work forward – Director’s Commissions and succession planning**

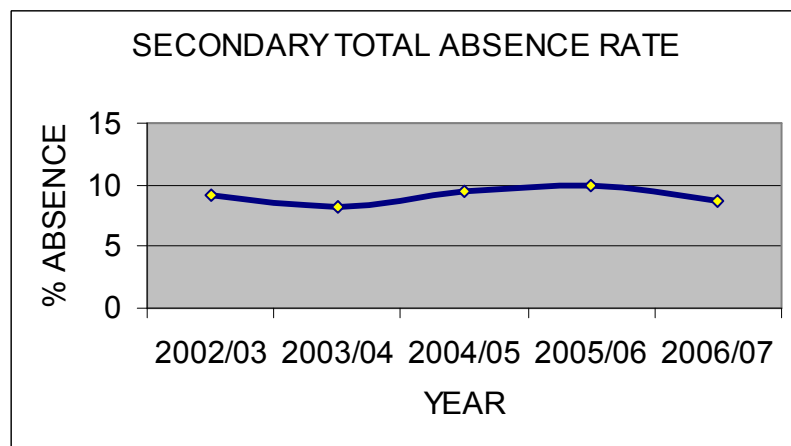
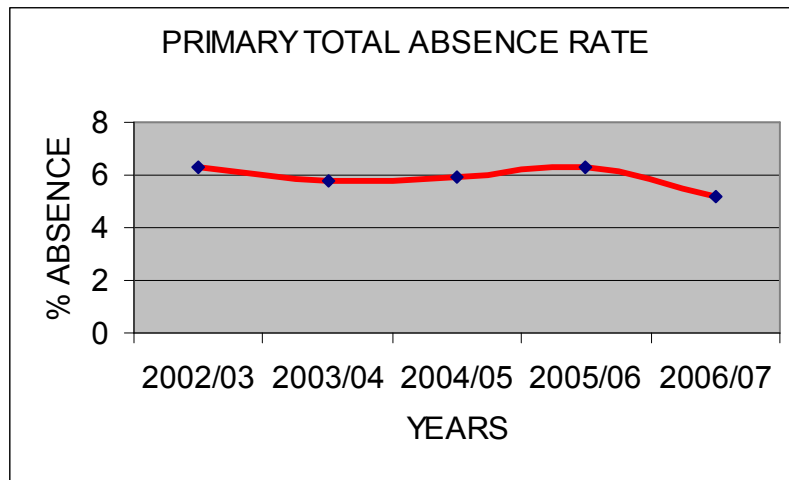
In addition to the key points above, there are two further strands of activity, which require immediate attention. These are Director’s Commissions to tackle pressing needs within the borough and the development of school leadership models to support succession planning, raising standards and improved outcomes.

### **Director’s Commissions**

Goals and strategies need to be supported by individual business and project plans across all contributing agencies. There are two immediate tasks into which we must put resources. The first of these will be a focus on school attendance. We need to understand why we are a bottom 10 performing authority and take measures to tackle the underlying problems. The second area is the transition from primary school to secondary school and the dip in pupil performance in some parts of the Borough. We need to know what more we can do to support transfer to ensure that Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 value added is as high as possible.

## Delivering Director's Commissions

Background:



Format:

Each Commission will have an independent chairperson, drawn from the local community. The Chairperson for the Commission on Attendance will be Steven Robinson, the Managing Director of Capita in the region. The Chairperson for the Commission on transition/standards will be David Heaton OBE, the retiring Principal of Queen Elizabeth College.

Each Commission will have a responsible Assistant Director who will ensure that the commission delivers to timescale. The Assistant Director will be able to draw upon any staff in the Department to ensure that the work is completed and may invite representatives from other organisations to sit on the commission.

Each Commission is expected to complement related initiatives taking place within the Borough, such as the LSP Enquiry Groups. However, because the Commissions will have different reporting timescales and a need to pilot and evaluate initiatives, the Commissions will be led by the Department.

**Budget:**

The Commission will have a budget of £10,000 to cover additional costs. Officer time will be deployed as required.

**Timescale:**

Each Commission should produce a final report within 6 months of inauguration. The final report will be made to the Director and recommendations stemming from the report, which require a change in policy, or practice will be brought to Cabinet.

**Methodology:**

Each Commission is expected to hold at least 1 day long stakeholder event, with national speakers, regional best practice and local best practice being showcased.

Each Commission should ask the following questions:

- What is the current approach to the issue in the Borough?
- What is driving this approach, and how well is it working?
- How is the strategy currently structured?
- What are the key roles and responsibilities of different agencies?
- What is the outcome that Darlington wants and what does it really mean?
- What does it mean to children and young people?
- What is being done to challenge current performance?
- What is being done to share best practice?
- What are the barriers to improvement?
- How can they be overcome?
- How will improvements be sustained?

## **20. The importance of School Leadership for Every Child Matters**

In January 2007 the DfES published an independent study into school leadership and how to identify the next generation of school leaders. The *Independent Study into School Leadership*, commissioned from Price Waterhouse Cooper, examined a range of current and new ideas and practices to boost school standards and deliver even more effective management of schools through improved leadership models. The background to the report was the changing social and policy framework under which schools operate. The report noted that 'What school leaders are expected to do now and in the future is significantly different from what it was even a few years ago.'

We recognise that school leadership is changing and Darlington has already been a trailblazer for innovative leadership models. Leadership is increasingly widely distributed across senior staff, including bursars and business managers who play a full part in the senior leadership team.

The report made a number of key recommendations including:

- diversifying leadership models,
- distributing leadership, responsibility and accountability, and
- developing succession planning.

The current performance of school leaders is a complex position to understand. A National College for School Leadership survey in 2003 had showed that the wider public thought that Head teachers were particularly good examples of leadership – because they had implemented many new initiatives whilst maintaining the rise in standards each year. However, Ofsted have identified that up to 20% of Head teachers were unsatisfactory in their leadership. In addition, the drive from government is to demonstrate that failing schools can be turned around quicker in order to reduce the number of children who experience poor quality education and this is reducing the time available to Heads to demonstrate that they can make a difference.

The Chief Executive of the National College of School Leadership, Steve Munby summarised the report well when he said that:

*“School leadership must remain focussed on raising pupil achievements. However, given the environment in which schools and public services operate today, enhancing leaders’ change management skills is vital if schools are to become organisations which meet the expectations of pupils and parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”*

The expectations referred to include promoting all 5 outcomes for children and young people, personalising learning, sharing information to inform interventions and preparing young people for life after school.

Ultimately, the school workforce is the key to raising educational standards, but they can only do this in conjunction with the other services working around the child, the family and the community. Effective leadership and management is a critical component in that process. It is crucial that leadership strategies are developed which enable school leaders to focus on their core role of leading teaching and learning, whilst at the same time including the other services in the distributed leadership model. It is about ensuring that school standards and Every Child Matters are complementary.

There are some particular challenges ahead in ensuring that we can, collectively, deliver school leadership and meet the expectations of society. Research suggests that 36% of primary schools are finding it difficult to recruit a suitable candidate for Headship. Faith schools are finding it even tougher with re-advertisements in Church of England schools at 40% and 58% in Catholic schools. Nationally, over the next 3 years there will be a significant increase in the number of Head teachers retiring. This is exacerbated by the number of Heads taking early retirement.

There is a compelling case for taking *local* action to address the challenge of leadership succession. The projected shortfall in numbers coming forward for school leadership posts and Headships cannot be absorbed by the system and we run the risk of having acute shortages in the coming years.

The age profile of Heads is one issue but it is not the only one in the succession challenge. Heads are overwhelmingly positive about their role but they now face an unprecedented mix of very high levels of devolved responsibility, sharp accountability structures, and radical changes in the way schools interact with other services. Whilst many school leaders regard these changes positively, there is no question that they heighten the complexity and demands of the role.

The increased demands on Head teachers recently include:

- Extended opening hours
- Increased responsibility for pupil welfare
- Implementing teaching and learning responsibility points
- Workforce reform
- School improvement partners
- Newish inspection regime
- Producing the self-evaluation form
- Personalized learning
- The review of KS3
- The Steer report on behaviour
- School meal reform; and
- Running a school when it is in a building site

National evidence shows that 43% of deputies do not wish to progress to Headship and 70% of middle leaders say they do not aspire to Headship. Reasons cited include accountability pressures and other work stresses, as well as perceived reduction in pupil contact. Heads, however, cite pupil achievement as the key aspect of the job that motivates them. In other words, the perceptions of Deputies and middle managers are based on only part of the experience of current leaders, and they fail to recognise the positive rewards of the role, which are reported by school leaders.

Schools in Darlington have, at an individual level and through some local initiatives, already taken action to support succession planning and to review the leadership models which best deliver the rise in standards and the 5 outcomes for each child or young person. As a local authority leadership team, we need to engage more with the schemes being developed to recruit new Head teachers and to deal with succession planning and we need to ensure that all schools benefit from the best practice which exists.

It is also important to agree the measures which tell us that leadership is right in schools so that we know what makes an effective Head and one who demonstrates taking responsibility. The success criteria established for the National Leaders in Education, recently appointed by the DfES, provide a useful starting point for defining successful leadership. The criteria were developed

particularly for schools in challenging circumstances but they represent a ready base line and have been adapted here.

The success criteria will depend on the specific circumstances of the school but are likely to include a number of the following:

- pupil achievement in line with challenging and moderated targets
- improved CVA scores
- measurable and validated improvements in the key performance areas of leadership and management
- early emergence from special measures, where appropriate
- reduction in exclusions
- increased popularity of the school (i.e. increased number of first choice applications)
- reduction in complaints received by the LA
- improved morale of school staff (as evidenced by staff absence); and
- reduction in pupil absence

A leadership programme for Darlington schools should include a strategy designed to deliver measurable improvements in all 5 outcomes for children and young people and should provide innovative support arrangements for the new leadership models, including those using leaders from outside of the teaching profession. This effective support package should ensure that Darlington is able to recruit strong Head teachers and other leaders to its schools.

It is proposed that a group of Head teachers and officers bring forward plans to develop a comprehensive leadership programme.

## **21. Creating a structure for the delivery of effective Children's Services – within the Council**

Following the establishment of the Department of Children's Services in 2005, the responsibilities carried by the Assistant Directors were changed over a period of time to give responsibility for delivering the Every Child Matters outcomes across each services' arm.

Over the two years that have elapsed since then, however, it has become increasingly clear that there is a need to review the way in which the directorate is organised. There are a number of reasons for this:

The responsibility for school improvement is divided between two Assistant Directors. National Strategies consultants and school improvement officers are not linked to the Assistant Director with responsibility for School Standards.

Provision for children with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is currently split across two service arms. A recent government policy document makes clear that the provision of education and the provision of care for this most vulnerable group of children and young people should be more closely co-ordinated so that there is 'closer alignment of the work of these services at individual pupil level'.

The DfES takes a similar view of the services provided for schools to help them make provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), arguing that there should be 'close alignment of the work of SEN/inclusion services at classroom and school level with LA curriculum and school improvement services'. This is also the message of the National Strategies. In Darlington, these services are currently managed by two different Assistant Directors.

It is difficult to match the rapid pace of change in national policy on Childcare provision, Children's Centres, extended schools and the Youth Offer whilst these related services are spread across two service arms in the Department and across a second Department.

It was understandable that changes were made to ensure that the Every Child Matters and school standards agendas were joined up by making each Assistant Director responsible for 2 or more of the 5 outcomes and by dividing responsibility for 'enjoy and achieve' across 3 Assistant Directors. The presumption behind the arrangement, however, is that the workforce will only be sufficiently reformed to deliver improved outcomes if traditional working practices are removed and that removing them requires structural change. In effect, this approach is in danger of leading to a situation where specialist skills, roles and functions are lost and this, in turn, leads to poorer outcomes for children. School improvement is a priority in Darlington, given the requirements of some of our schools and focussed activity is required to improve their performance.

## **Principles**

The proposed reorganisation of the department is based on some key principles:

- The management structure for the department should support an unwavering focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people;
- All services are equally committed to the vision statement for Children's Services, which focuses on raising standards, safeguarding, inclusion, early intervention, and partnership working. None of these principles are the exclusive preserve of any particular service arm;
- In order to provide high quality outcomes for children and young people, the directorate will continue to be a direct provider of some services, but will develop expertise and experience in commissioning where there is a clear advantage in doing so; and
- School Improvement and Safeguarding are the two main statutory responsibilities within Children's Services, and both need to be led by senior officers with an appropriate professional background.



The proposed structure is based on service arms, each led by an Assistant Director and each providing a way of grouping together services that benefit from sharing the same line management arrangements:

- *School Improvement* will deal with the provision of professional support for schools and other services, and be directly responsible for children and young people educated other than at school.
- *Partnerships* will oversee the development of the 5 locality model, extended schools, the Children's Trust and will co-ordinate voluntary and out of school provision for children and young people. The service arm will carry lead responsibility for developing and implementing the Children and Young People's Plan and the broader preventative strategy, and be the first point of contact with key partners including the PCT. It will manage the Connexions Service. The service arm will lead on development to integrate service provision with health, in line with the vision statement. It will manage the broader support for families, through the Libraries and Adult and Continuing Education.
- *Children and Families* will be responsible for meeting the needs of individual children and young people, particularly those most in need, and will take an overall lead in ensuring appropriate provision for disabled children and young people.
- *Planning and Resources* will be responsible for maintaining the full range of support services for the rest of the department, including schools, and ensuring fair access according to need. This role will be equivalent to related roles in the other Departments, with the same relationship to capital strategy and management.

The *Partnerships* post will be an entirely new service arm. It will build on the work of the Children's Trust, by maintaining and developing the capacity for early intervention in the lives of children and young people. The service will concentrate particularly on children and young people at Tier 2, in other words, those that are most at risk of slipping into the kind of crisis that requires expensive remedial services. The authority is committed to the view that services of this kind can only be provided in partnership and that these partnerships must be inclusive, involving the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The key to success lies in making sure that provision is targeted, co-ordinated and sustained, and that services engage with known and named children and young people. The links between services will enable a common approach for all children and young people between the ages of 0 – 19.

The structure chart associated with this proposal is set out as Appendix 4.

## **22. Creating a structure for the delivery of effective Children's Services outside of the department**

There is an immense amount of good will and commitment to partnership working across agencies in Darlington but some of the current delivery structures require some further development. Bodies such as the 14-19 Trust and the Children's Trust have been established and have delivered their first work streams but a refresh is required.

Organisations such as the Primary Care Trust have already effectively aligned their services to those of the cluster and locality model. This is welcomed and could be the starting point for a more integrated and developed approach. In particular, universal Health provision could be brought under a closer management arrangement with other services working alongside them, whilst still respecting the need for appropriate clinical governance. Families with children with complex needs nationally have been known to work with up to 19 different agencies and staff and there may be scope to streamline some of the processes that underpin this arrangement for families.

Transition to adult services for young people with complex needs can be a stressful time. Staff in Children's Services, Community Services, Health and the voluntary sector may well be able to identify improvements which can be made in current practices and these improvements will be easier to implement if integrated management systems are in place.

## **23. Conclusion**

This paper sets out the context and priorities for linking school standards with improved outcomes for all children and young people. The priorities have been widely consulted on. It is now time to begin to act to implement the priorities and reporting progress to stakeholders and partners.