

RAISING ATTAINMENT

Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan, Children and Young People Portfolio

Responsible Director – Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members:
 - (a) of developments and initiatives at present being carried out by Children’s Services designed to raise attainment for all children and young people in Darlington; and
 - (b) to highlight attainment as a result of the impact of those initiatives and developments.

Information and Analysis

2. Investment in education in the Borough has been a priority over an extended period of time. Our involvement with Pfl builds (such as the Education Village), and the establishment of Darlington’s first Academy (in the former Eastbourne School), demonstrate our renewed focus on raising standards for all Darlington’s young people. A key tool for raising standards within the Borough’s schools has been the use of the school condition document. This tool was developed with schools and trailed in the academic year 2006-07 and is now a key part of the raising standards strategy.
3. Darlington is an average performing authority by most attainment indicators, with the exception being a much better than average performance at A level and much worse exclusion rates. Our post 16 participation rate in education is only third quartile and at age 17 drops to bottom quartile. There is no doubt that the disaffection rates contribute to the low staying on rates. Recent actions have seen improvements in the performance of the poorer performing schools and the attainment gap between schools is narrowing. The gap between the highest performing school at 5 A*-C grades and the lowest closed from 74% in 2006 to 65% in 2007. At Key Stage 3 the gap in performance closed in English (from 45% to 28%), Maths (from 32% to 25%) and Science (from 45% to 27%). The disparity in performance remains at Key Stage 1 and is narrowing slightly at Key Stage 2. Six out of the 7 secondary schools improved their Contextual Value Added performance in 2007. In the primary phase, 15 out of 26 schools improved their CVA scores.
4. Ofsted reports show that 66% of our schools are currently graded as good or better and 30% are graded as satisfactory. One school and the PRU are under a notice to improve.

5. Quality assurance measures showed that in January 2007, 10 Darlington schools were judged to offer good or outstanding teaching. In December 2007 this figure has risen to 24 schools. Over the same period, the number of schools with good or outstanding attendance rose from 17 to 22.
6. The number of 16 year olds gaining no qualifications fell from 4.4% to 3.8%.
7. The Local Authority successfully developed a model of school improvement to support schools in special measures or with notices to improve. This model previously supported 3 schools but has now been rolled out to partner every school in the borough. The support comes from local authority staff and from other schools and staff in the Borough who have proven expertise. In particular, we are supporting 5 schools intensively and 11 schools are getting targeted support.
8. The Local Authority has held major conference on primary-secondary transition, on behaviour and a further one is planned on school attendance. These are for schools and are designed to share best practice.
9. Each year the Audit Commission carries out a survey of schools' views of their local authority. In the 2007 survey the local authority rating in the areas of support for schools, knowledge of the issues faced by schools and the quality of the leadership offered by the local authority showed up to a 37% increase in approval ratings. The quality of leadership of officers is rated in the top quartile nationally.

Our principles for work to raise standards

10. Raising standards of achievement in Darlington requires a partnership approach between parents, schools, the local authority and other agencies and services. The basic principles of partnership are that:
 - (a) we all share responsibility for the progress and well being of all learners;
 - (b) we promote lifelong learning;
 - (c) we believe that collaboration adds value to schools and communities;
 - (d) we are committed to collaborating to overcome the barriers to educational achievement, emotional health and economic well being;
 - (e) we are committed to working in partnership with other agencies, employers, parents and the voluntary sector;
 - (f) under delegation, schools are primarily responsible for their own performance;
 - (g) the local authority should support schools based on needs;
 - (h) we should all try to improve upon our previous best;
 - (i) we should celebrate success, share best practice and recognize all forms of achievement;
 - (j) we will develop leadership at all levels;
 - (k) our provision should be high quality and value for money; and
 - (l) relationships should be based on mutual trust and transparency

The role of schools

11. We want every school in Darlington to be a school of choice. Successful schools share a broad set of characteristics which can be described in terms of the way in which they deliver their responsibilities to promote the well-being and achievement of all of their pupils.
12. Schools can be governed by a range of arrangements and are largely autonomous. A responsible school is one which stresses the importance of being managerially self-sufficient.
13. The hallmarks of a school that has successfully taken responsibility for shaping its own destiny are:
 - (a) a strong and distinctive sense of purpose
 - (b) the capacity to innovate
 - (c) a powerful collective ethos that is shared by all staff
 - (d) high quality planning that is financially sound
 - (e) a stubborn refusal to allow the socio-economic background of pupils and resources (or the lack of them) to become an obstacle to progress.
14. What an exclusive emphasis on “autonomy” misses, however, is the importance of being responsible for others, of *carrying* responsibility. Schools operate within a wider social context and are part of a children’s service provided by and for the community as a whole.
15. The hallmarks of a school that is willing to carry its share of a wider responsibility are:
 - (a) a willingness to be inclusive, to make provision for all children,
 - (b) extended schooling,
 - (c) a strong sense of partnership with children, their parents, and the community – particularly through children’s centres
 - (d) an appreciation that ‘education’ is about more than schooling
 - (e) active involvement with other schools and the wider learning community
16. Essentially, carrying responsibility is about schools knowing how to fit into the bigger picture and fulfilling their part in it.
17. Schools are generally managerially self-sufficient so it is important that they recognize that they are accountable to the community as a whole.
18. The hallmarks of a school that is fully accountable are:
 - (a) acceptance of the standards agenda
 - (b) an appreciation that raising standards is not just about academic performance
 - (c) genuine ownership of targets to drive work in individual classrooms as well as in the school as a whole
 - (d) a strong relationship between the governing body and the staff employed by the school
 - (e) regular use of internal and external audit to drive school improvement, including recognizing the role of the governing body to challenge the Headteacher

- (f) an active commitment to rigorous self evaluation; and
- (g) an intelligent use of the school's Self Evaluation Form

High quality school leadership

19. The Children and Young People's Plan, describes in detail what we expect from our schools. It is an absolute given that high quality leadership, teaching and assessment for learning are the prerequisites for high attainment levels. Whilst we need to invest in some services for pupils who are struggling or challenging, we are matching this by investing in school leadership. To do this we are identifying aspiring school leaders in our schools and working with the University of Teesside to develop a leadership programme to improve their skills and to encourage them to remain in Darlington. We have called this approach the Darlington Leadership College. This has received external funding and is using our excellent Headteachers to bring through the next generation of leaders – working with up to 8 candidates each year. We are also utilising the strengths of Darlington Headteachers in a coaching role. Eamonn Farrar of Hurworth Maths & Computing College is working on assertive mentoring with staff and pupils at Haughton. Neil Parker of Heighington/Bishopton Federation and Peter King of Corporation Road are acting as primary School Improvement Partners in Darlington Schools.

Working with school governors to challenge Headteachers about standards

20. A governing body is only effective if it carries out its duties as a 'critical friend'. If it behaves as an 'uncritical lover' or as a 'hostile enemy' then it will not contribute to raising standards. The quality of governing bodies can be enhanced by the quality of training and support they receive. Governing bodies have been asked to complete a self-review so that they can see where their strengths and weaknesses lie. This will form the basis for a development programme.

The measures of progress

21. Darlington's GCSE results in 2007 at 5A* to C rose to 60%, an increase of 2.1% on the 2006 results. This ranks Darlington 2nd amongst the Tees Valley authorities. Our position within the whole of the North East region is equally good with 45.9% of students obtaining 5A* to C including English and Maths. Nationally this ranks Darlington 69th out of 149 Local Authorities. Individual schools enjoyed their own successes with Branksome Comprehensive gaining its highest ever GCSE pass rate with 59.5% of pupils gaining 5A* to C grades as well as securing a positive Ofsted report and significantly improving attendance. Hurworth School, Maths & Computing College, was ranked 32nd in England for Contextual Value Added (CVA) whilst the Local Authority improves its position by 26 places to be ranked 123rd overall. Eastbourne School (now the Eastbourne Church of England Academy) recorded one of the most improved performances nationally attaining 45% 5A* to C up from 19% in 2006. This pleasing result was attained thanks to excellent partnership working between Local Authority personnel and the school's staff and governors.

22. Key Stage 3 results also showed a great improvement. English scores rose at L5+ and at L6+. Scores in English improved by almost 10% on the previous year, doubling the national rise. Level 5+ performance was consolidated in Maths and improved in Science and ICT. No schools were below the threshold for causing concern. The Local Authority was ranked 72nd nationally.
23. At Key Stage 2 the gains made in previous years were consolidated with further improvement at L4+ in Writing and Science. It was pleasing to note that Darlington schools performance at L5 was greater than the national average in all subjects. The overall contextual value added score for the Borough rose from 100.2 in 2006 to 100.4 in 2007.
24. Key Stage 1 results fell slightly overall in Darlington as was the pattern nationally. Teacher moderation is now providing a far more accurate picture of children's ability than testing did previously. In Reading 81.8% of children achieved L2+ whilst 24.2% achieved L3. In Writing 77.3% achieved L2+ whilst 9.1% achieved L3. In Maths 88.2% were at L2+ whilst 18.5% were at L3 and in Science 88.2% were at L2+ with 24.8% at L3.
25. All Darlington schools have a School Improvement Partner (SIP) and a Lead Officer as of September 2007. The SIPs have carried out the performance management of all Headteachers across the Borough prior to December 31st 2007 as well as carrying out a review of standards in each school and collecting targets for attainment in Summer 2009. Their work is coordinated by the SIP Manager in School Improvement and Development.
26. A Team of Local Authority Officers carried out a valuable training session for Members of Children and Young Persons Scrutiny Committee on interpreting school data.
27. In December, The Director of Children's Services received a note from the Regional Director for the National Primary and Secondary Strategies congratulating Darlington on being the most improved Local Authority in the North East of England in the period June to December 2007. The judgement was based on RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings awarded by the National Strategies based on school and Local Authority performance.
28. Attendance has improved in Darlington Primary and Secondary Schools during 2006/07. Our Primary attendance rate went from 93.7% in 2005/06 to 94.8% in 2006/07. At Secondary level the improvement went from 91.4% in 2005/06 to 92.4% in 2006/07 (these figures do not include Eastbourne School). The Authority had 3 persistent absence schools (Branksome, Haughton and Eastbourne) cumulatively they recorded a 30% reduction in persistent absentees.

Legal Implications

29. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

30. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

31. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

32. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

Recommendation

33. It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and comment on the measures taken to improve standards across the Borough.

Reason

34. To ensure that the School Improvement Strategy has the support of Members.

Murray Rose
Director of Children's Services

Background Papers

Director of Children's Services Commission on Transition between Key Stage 2 and 3
'Behaviour in Darlington, The Way Forward'
Protocols and Procedures for Engagement with Schools

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