



meeting	EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE		
date	22 February 2005	agenda item number	5

## REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE PUPIL AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN FORMER COALFIELD AREAS STUDY GROUP

### **Review of pupil and school performance in former Nottinghamshire coalfield areas**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide the main findings of the study group's review of pupil and school performance in former coalfield areas in the County.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The group was established to examine the performance of pupils and schools in former coalfield areas and to scrutinise the actions taken by the Education Service to improve this performance. The terms of reference for the group were:
  - i) to consider the current performance of pupils and schools in the former coalfield districts in relation to national and county performance
  - ii) to explore the issues relating to the relatively low performance of schools in former coalfield areas
  - iii) to scrutinise the work undertaken by the LEA to raise performance in these areas and consider its effectiveness, including support for learning both within and beyond school hours and partnership working with other County Council Departments and external agencies.
3. The group's deliberations were informed by the key findings of the two recent DfES reports on the theme: *Patterns of Educational Attainment in the British Coalfields, 2001* - Research Report 314; and *Raising Attainment in Schools in Former Coalfield Areas, 2003* - Research Report RR423 (**Appendix 1**).
4. Currently two definitions are available to identify the coalfield areas: one is offered by the Coalfield Regeneration Trust Taskforce (1998) and the second by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (**Appendix 2**). The group worked from the former definition as it captured a higher number of schools than the second and, more importantly, it was considered to be more in tune with the extent of social need experienced by Nottinghamshire communities.

5. Based on the first definition 58% of primary and 66% of secondary schools in Nottinghamshire are deemed to be in former coalfield areas. These schools are mainly concentrated in Ashfield and Mansfield followed by Bassetlaw, Gedling and Newark districts. The remaining two districts - Broxtowe and Rushcliffe - also have a small number of schools which come within the first definition.

## Performance of pupils and schools in the former coalfield areas

### Key Stage 1

6. Overall, pupils in former coalfields are performing close to the national and county figures at level 2+ (**Appendix 3** for Key Stage 1 data). The key findings presented are as follows:
  - pupils' performance in mathematics over the four years (2001-2004) in the former coalfield area is the most promising. Overall performance is better than the national figures and is very close to the LEA figures
  - pupils' performance in writing in the former coalfield area schools is only just under the national figures in three of the last four years. However, they continued to perform below the LEA figures over the four-year period
  - pupils' performance in reading has fluctuated. In 2003 and 2004, the performance of pupils in the former coalfield areas was below the national and LEA figures. In the two years previously, however, their performance was close to or above the national figure, but below that of the County figure
  - girls continue to outperform boys over the four-year period in all three areas. Boys in Nottinghamshire's former coalfield areas are performing favourably when compared with national figures in writing and mathematics
  - at the higher level 3, with one exception, pupils in the former coalfield areas perform below the national and LEA figures in reading and mathematics. The picture is considerably better in writing where pupils perform better than the national figures over the four years, but below that for the LEA.

### Key Stage 2

7. At the end of Key Stage 2, in recent years, with two exceptions (in English and mathematics in 2001), the performance of all schools in Nottinghamshire has matched or often exceeded the national figures in all three core subjects at level 4+ (**Appendix 4** for Key Stage 2 data). However, pupil and school performance in former coalfield areas has remained below the national and local figures in all three subjects. Their performance is moving in the right direction, however, and the rate of improvement is encouraging. The key findings are summarised below:
  - from 2001 to 2004, pupils' performance in former coalfield areas improved by nearly 4% in English, twice the rate of national improvement of 2%. The rate of improvement, however, is lower than that achieved by the LEA schools overall

- the rate of improvement in mathematics is the most encouraging. The schools in former coalfield areas raised their performance by 5.3% against the national rate of 3% and the LEA rate of 5.8%
- at the higher level 5, the healthy rate of improvement is repeated in mathematics where it is above the national rate. It is also slightly better than the national rate in science. Nationally there is a decline in performance at the higher level 5 in English, but the rate of decline in schools in Nottinghamshire former coalfield areas is less than the national. In all three subjects the rate of improvement is lower than that achieved by all schools in Nottinghamshire
- over the four years girls continue to outperform boys in English. The reverse is the case in mathematics where boys outperform girls in all four years. In science their relative performance is close.

### Key Stage 3

8. At the end of Key Stage 3, at level 5+, Nottinghamshire schools overall have performed below the national and LEA averages in English, mathematics and science for the last four years (**Appendix 5** for Key Stage 3 data). Pupil and school performance in the former coalfield areas follow the same pattern. However, the rate of improvement in former coalfield areas and for all schools is again encouraging. The key findings are outlined below:
  - since 2002 the rate of improvement in mathematics (6.9%) is almost equal to the national rate (7%) and is a little higher in English (6.5% in Nottinghamshire against the national 6.0%). In science, the picture reflects the variable national implementation of the Science Strategy. The standards in science are lower than those achieved by all County schools and nationally
  - at the higher level 6, the performance in the former coalfield areas is considerably lower than the national and local figures. The rate of improvement is also lower than that achieved by schools nationally and locally.

### Key Stage 4

9. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C grades in GCSEs has remained below the national figures for the last four years (**Appendix 6**). This gap is also reflected in the performance of schools in former coalfield areas. Other key findings are summarised below:
  - the rate of improvement in former coalfield area schools is disappointingly low. Since 2001, only 0.4% more pupils gained 5+ A\*-C, compared with the national improvement rate of 3.3% and the local improvement rate of 2%.
  - the percentage of girls achieving five higher passes remains consistently higher than that of boys. However, in the former coalfield area schools, boys' performance shows a steady upward trend since 2002 - from 37.3% to 38.5%, but the percentage of girls gaining higher passes shows

fluctuations and a downward trend – from 48.6% in 2002 to 46.4% in 2003 and 47.8% in 2004.

### **Value-added performance**

10. Performance varies between schools in former coalfield areas as it does in non-coalfield areas (**Appendix 7**). Using prior attainment as a basis, schools with similar performance at entry achieved different results at the end of key stages 2 and 3. This points to some variation in the value added by schools in the former coalfield areas.

### **Pupils remaining in education after leaving school**

11. The staying-on rate after school leaving age in the former coalfield areas school is below the LEA rates for the last four years, but the gap is narrowing (**Appendix 8**). In comparison with all schools in England, the staying-on rate in former coalfield areas remains considerably below. Ashfield, Mansfield and Bassetlaw districts have a lower rate than the other districts of the County. The percentage of pupils remaining in education after leaving school in all Nottinghamshire schools is close to the national rate.

### **Performance as judged by Ofsted inspections**

12. During 2003-2004, 55 primary schools and eight secondary schools were inspected (**Appendix 9**). Some of the key judgements are outlined below:
  - the positive picture of performance in primary schools indicated by the performance data above is reflected in the inspection findings. Overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory or better in well over 90% of primary schools, with nearly 70% judged as good or better. There were little differences between schools in the former coalfield areas and all schools in Nottinghamshire
  - the level of pupil achievement (a different judgement from standards) was judged to be higher in former coalfield area schools – 73% good or better compared with 71% for all schools. However, the percentage of schools achieving less than satisfactory standards was also higher in the former coalfield area schools: 12% compared with 9% in all Nottinghamshire schools
  - the schools in former coalfield areas fare better when compared with all schools in the provision for inclusion, change in effectiveness since the last inspection, links with parents and the community, governance and the leadership of the headteacher. These are significant judgements that acknowledge the strengths present in these schools.
  - the rate of attendance was judged to be less than satisfactory in 39% of schools, compared with 33% of all primary schools in Nottinghamshire
  - five of the eight secondary schools inspected are situated in the former coalfield areas. This is too small a sample for any serious statistical consideration. Two of the schools were judged to be requiring special measures. One of the schools is now closed and forms part of the adjacent secondary school.

## **Attendance**

13. In 2004 the rate of attendance has improved in Nottinghamshire primary schools from 94.1% in 2003 to 94.6% which is slightly above the national rate. In the former coalfield areas the rate is below the national and county rates and shows some decline from 93.6% in 2003 to 93.4%. In all secondary schools the attendance rate has declined from 91.5% in 2003 to 91.2% which is also reflected in the attendance rate of schools in the former coalfield areas from 91.1% to 91.0%. Attendance in all secondary schools and of those in the former coalfield areas remain below the national rate.

## **Issues relating to the relatively low performance of schools in former coalfield areas**

14. Discussions during visits to three primary and two secondary schools and the responses from the questionnaire sent to schools raised the following issues, almost all of which relate to factors external to schools:
- unemployment creating social disadvantage and contributing to a culture of low parental aspirations, for themselves and their children
  - feelings of job insecurity in areas in which coalmining offered regular opportunities for employment
  - disinterest in education, perhaps stemming from parents' own lack of success at school
  - lack of support at home for children's education, including homework, often due to inability to support
  - families under pressure and some lacking stability
  - poor communal facilities for furthering educational opportunities for adults or leisure pursuits
  - poor health affecting children's concentration at school
  - lack of communication skills which have direct bearing on children's learning and success at school
  - low attainment on entry to nursery
  - lack of male role models
  - boys' attitudes towards learning
  - at the secondary level, academic curriculum not benefiting all students
  - sometimes, low expectations at school
  - often, difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff in schools.
15. The above comments substantially agree with the key findings of the research report RR423 referred to in paragraph 3.
16. Despite the perceived negative impact of mainly external factors on pupil and school performance in the former coalfield, schools visited and those responding to the questionnaire were optimistic and believed that they could and do make a difference. Schools have already taken practical steps to ensure that pupils in former coalfield areas have secure basic academic skills

and key personal and social skills essential for success later in their lives. Almost all schools provide enrichment activities, within and beyond school hours.

## **LEA support to raise standards in former coalfield areas and its effectiveness**

17. Currently the LEA is involved in supporting Nottinghamshire schools through a number of initiatives (**Appendix 10**). Almost all of them are nationally conceived but locally implemented. Given the small scale of this study, it has not been possible to examine the effectiveness of all of them. The work involved in some of the key initiatives and their effectiveness is outlined next.
18. Currently the LEA's support for primary schools focuses on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. Some schools receive intensive support for literacy and numeracy as part of the primary strategy. The improving school programme for primary schools caters for another group of schools. Some of the lowest-performing schools are now receiving further support under the umbrella of the intensifying support programme. The primary leadership programme has attracted a large number of schools. Primary schools from Mansfield and Ashfield, two areas with very high concentration of schools in former coalfield areas, are well represented in these support programmes. A recent initiative, Ashfield Excellence in Cities Cluster, involves nine primary schools and seven secondary schools.
19. The effectiveness of the support is evident in rising national standards in primary schools. The evaluations of literacy and numeracy training events are extremely positive – 98% good or better and never less than satisfactory. The whole package of support has resulted in significant improvements in literacy and numeracy. The gap is gradually closing between schools in the former coalfield areas and the other Nottinghamshire schools. The most encouraging impact of the LEA intervention is felt in primary schools that have benefited from the initiatives outlined above. The rate of improvement is significant (**Appendix 11**).
20. The Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) initiative is supporting secondary schools to raise standards as is the Key Stage 3 national strategy. Out of 11 schools earmarked for support under the LIG arrangements, eight are in the former coalfield areas. Three of the former coalfield areas schools are benefiting from their involvement through the excellence cluster. The rate of improvement shown in national results is greater than in non-LIG schools (**Appendix 12**).
21. The LEA's targeted support for schools in various levels of need is well received. Schools from the former coalfield areas make up a substantial component of this group. In autumn 2004, around 72% of the schools receiving targeted support were in former coalfield areas. In the most recent evaluation 98% of schools judged the targeted support to be good or better, and 74% felt it had been very good. As schools build their own capacity they no longer require targeted support. During the last year 41 schools were removed from the targeted support scheme.

22. The work of link inspectors is highly valued in schools, a view that has recently been confirmed by the 2004 survey of Nottinghamshire schools by the Audit Commission. A satisfaction rate of well over 90% in the survey mirrors the School Improvement Services' own positive feedback from schools.
23. The Education Welfare Service collects and collates attendance data and provides practical support for schools in improving attendance. Median targets have been set for all schools to be reached by 2007/08. The Service's recent calculation of attendance in former coalfield areas indicates that 43% of secondary schools were below their median target compared with 42% across the County, and 45% were below at primary level compared to 33% across the County. The Service has been engaged in promoting the Early Bird and Late Gate schemes to improve attendance. In 2003/04, the Service's general work with 38 primary schools, of which 84% were in former coalfield areas, has been effective. In 81% of these schools the attendance improved, but it declined in 19%.
24. Discussions with schools and responses to the questionnaire reveal that the support provided by the Research and Development section is highly regarded and found useful in raising standards. Not only does the group analyse the national data at each key stage, it also offers detailed analysis of test papers to inform schools' planning and future priorities. Link inspectors have observed that the work of Research & Development has contributed to the effective and efficient setting of statutory targets.
25. The LEA's Arts Support Service and Environmental Education Support Service are engaged in providing curriculum enrichment opportunities for pupils and schools in the former coalfield areas. A recent analysis indicates that activities included instrumental music tuition and 11<sup>th</sup> session workshop centres (seven of these are in former coalfield areas). Opportunities to participate in performances were taken in just over two-thirds of secondary schools in the former coalfield areas schools. Of the 21 schools which gained the Artsmark, 13 came from the former coalfield area schools. All pupils in primary and secondary schools are given the opportunity to participate in an outdoor residential experience.
26. Visits by members of the study group and responses to the questionnaires clearly indicate that schools are involved in a range of other initiatives. The Building Learning Communities initiative is taking hold in schools in the former coalfield areas. The provision of breakfast clubs, Study Support, booster classes and learning mentors is growing. Their impact is not immediately discernible but schools believe they are contributing to conditions that would help them to raise standards. The development of Sure Start/Early Years Centres in the former coalfield areas is seen as a step in the right direction as they will provide joined-up local services where they are needed most. It is anticipated that they will have long-term educational benefits and contribute to standards being achieved in schools.

## RECOMMENDATION

27. The recommendations below are firmly based on the belief that the LEA has been effective in supporting schools in the former coalfield areas, particularly in primary schools. It is fully aware that further improvements are needed, particularly in secondary schools. The following recommendations are made for consideration:

- (1) continue with current intervention strategies, identify what works best and disseminate good practice
- (2) establish an annual collation, analysis and reporting of performance data relating to schools in former coalfield areas to locate patterns of variation in performance and trends in order to direct the LEA's energies
- (3) establish a firm database to record all services provided for schools in the former coalfield areas and the schools' involvement in initiatives in order to join up activities more coherently
- (4) recognise the raising of pupil and schools' performance, overall and particularly in literacy and numeracy, in former coalfield areas as a priority for development for the LEA in its next EDP or equivalent plan
- (5) promote networks between schools in the former coalfield areas to facilitate collaborative learning and dissemination of good practice
- (6) support schools in promoting the idea of extended schooling, with a particular focus on the use of pre and after school provision
- (7) periodically survey views of local communities on how they think schools could help them
- (8) consider the development of 'community schools' as a future policy, with a particular focus on lifelong learning in schools, and encourage schools to recognise a role for community link personnel
- (9) continue with the most effective existing LEA links with schools, such as the role of the link inspector and enhance the link provision in other areas, for example, by having an education welfare officer and a member of behaviour support staff dedicated to a family of schools
- (10) set up an in-depth study to consider:
  - review of current definitions used for identifying former coalfield areas
  - pupil and schools' performance in the former coalfield area schools
  - factors contributing to extreme social disadvantage in these areas, such as disaffection, crime and drug misuse
  - support received from all local services and its effectiveness.

## COUNCILLOR YVONNE DAVIDSON

Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee: Pupil and School Performance in Former Nottinghamshire Coalfield Areas Study Group