

10 June 2013

Agenda Item: 11

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION STANDARDS AND
INCLUSION****A STRATEGY FOR CLOSING THE EDUCATIONAL GAPS IN
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – END OF YEAR ONE REVIEW****Purpose of the Report**

1. To present a review of the impact of the first year of Nottinghamshire's Closing the Educational Gaps Strategy.

Information and Advice**Context**

2. The Closing the Gap (CtG) Strategy was approved by County Council on 29 March 2012. The Strategy sets out the County Council's aim to ensure that the full range of services and partners work coherently with schools and other educational settings to maximise the impact of available resources in further raising the attainment and increasing the progress of the most vulnerable groups of learners.
3. This Strategy is designed to align on-going work across the County Council to support the closing of the educational attainment gap for vulnerable groups, particularly those children and young people eligible for free school meals (FSM), those who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Looked After Children (LAC).
4. It is current national policy to require schools to focus on narrowing educational attainment gaps and this is being monitored and reported annually by the Department for Education through its performance tables.

Key actions taken since the last six monthly report in December 2012

5. The key actions identified in the plan have been completed on time.
6. The **cross phase and cross service CtG Performance Board** has continued to meet termly to review the contribution each Local Authority service is making to close educational gaps and to hold each service to account for the impact of the work. The Board has also overseen a programme of professional development for all staff across Children, Families and Cultural Services (CFCS) which has ensured the sharing of effective practice for supporting vulnerable children and their families. Delegates attending these events report an increased understanding of their roles, responsibilities

and opportunities for cross service, cross phase locality working. All CFCS teams have committed to including actions to contribute to educational gaps within their 2013-14 Commissioning Plans. The Closing the Gap Strategy has been included in Nottinghamshire's draft Early Help Strategy.

7. The majority of schools across Nottinghamshire have continued to access **guidance and/or training on effective strategies to close educational gaps**. Closing the Gap articles have been written and included in the Nottinghamshire Governors' newsletter and, as a result, governors have requested further training opportunities in the 2013-14 sold offer. Equally, both primary and secondary head teachers have requested a focus on effective use of the Pupil Premium to close gaps in their summer term briefings. Both secondary and primary schools have adopted a range of strategies to promote the take up of free school meals, upon which the Pupil Premium funding is based, such as direct leafleting of parents and carers and use of the local press.
8. An additional data sharing forum has been established between the **Primary Social and Emotional Development Team (PSED) and the Education Improvement Service** in order to jointly analyse behaviour and attendance data with a particular focus on behaviour and safety in primary schools. This analysis is being used to support primary schools to identify underlying causes of inappropriate behaviour (such as language delay) and to broker support from speech and language therapists in order to remove barriers to engagement in learning. The team is actively supporting the development of school behaviour and attendance partnerships (SBAPs), facilitating access to other services in a timely manner, providing free training to schools where a pupil's placement is at risk and working with the Educational Psychology Service to provide guidance and resources to schools. Multi-agency meetings are being held to support schools to find local solutions to address behaviour and safety issues. Since September 2012, there has been a reduction in permanent exclusions across Nottinghamshire's primary schools.
9. A revised **Fair Access Protocol (FAP)** has been agreed by the Schools Admission Forum, formally consulted upon and agreed by the Children and Young People's Committee on 11 March 2013. The Locality FAP/SBAP groups have been made aware of their responsibilities. An Elective Home Education (EHE) protocol has been developed which clarifies process and responsibilities in relation to EHE pupils whose educational provision has been deemed unsuitable. Improved procedures for monitoring the number of pupils in Nottinghamshire without a school place alongside appropriate challenge to schools has significantly reduced the length of time that vulnerable learners are without a school place and has increased the proportion placed in school within the expected 20 day timescale.
10. **Data sets have been further developed at locality level to inform the Newark Closing the Gap pilot.** The Newark locality team is beginning to work in partnership with schools and other partners to develop and use a range of data sets to provide a more detailed view of reasons for educational underperformance and risk factors for vulnerable learners within Newark Town educational settings. This will enable the Newark team to identify specific target groups of learners of all ages who will be given access to a range of interventions with the intention of identifying what works best.

11. The Newark Town Closing the Gap locality-based pilot (2012-14) has now established a **Locality Steering Group which represents all partners across a range of services and educational settings in the town and also includes representation from Newark and Sherwood District Council**. This group has a clear strategic plan, oversees a cycle of 'plan, do and review' research activities and has established a structure and process for local governance, decision-making and shared accountability for closing educational gaps within the town. An electronic communication platform has been developed and is being used by all partners to share information and resources.
12. **Collaborative action research activities have been agreed in 4 key strands of investigation within the Newark CtG pilot based on the outcomes of the initial listening activity.** Each strand delivery team is made up of school practitioners and appropriate local authority specialists. Teams began by ensuring that all issues and barriers related to their strand of research were fully understood at a local level and in a local context. This enabled the Newark Town partners to plan and engage in practical activities with a major focus on literacy and communication skills development. They have agreed a town approach to supporting vulnerable learners at key transition points in their education journey. In addition, these teams are developing new ways of working together to identify and maximise the use of local resources in a more targeted way. For instance, the Adult Community Learning Service has allocated funding to priority schools and Children's Centres in Newark Town with the aim of improving family learning in partnership with schools.
13. A colleague from **Nottingham Trent University** attends Steering Group and delivery team meetings to gather evaluative evidence to inform the interim evaluation of the pilot. This report will be available in October 2013.
14. **A range of opportunities have been secured to work collaboratively with external strategic partners on the CtG Strategy as follows:**
 - 19 secondary schools have engaged in an **Education Endowment Foundation funded Y7 literacy intervention project** with 314 pupils supported over two phases of targeted intervention. On average, pupils involved have made 16 months progress in their reading comprehension. A second cohort of schools has been identified to access the same programme. This will provide a larger research sample and the combined outcomes will allow our external higher education partner, Birmingham University, to be secure about the validity of the results.
 - A strong working partnership is developing between **Nottinghamshire's Education Improvement Service, the Early Years team and the Speech and Language Therapists team**. These teams are taking part in a national '**Communication Leaders' pilot** in partnership with The Communications Trust and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. In addition, the team has been invited to interview for an additional Education Endowment Foundation funded programme aimed at developing good talk practices in 31 Nottinghamshire primary schools serving local areas of economic deprivation.
 - **A Youth Employment Strategy** for Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City has been agreed and published in January 2013 with the aim of creating more employment opportunities, improving transition pathways into work and preparing young people for

work. Proposals include the launch of a NCC branded apprenticeship incentive scheme for small and medium sized employers.

- **A three year community mentoring pilot** has been secured and launched in the Hawtonville area of Newark in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and Trent Bridge Community Sports Trust (Positive Futures). A joint management board has been formed; a target group of vulnerable learners identified through referrals from local schools and partner agencies, and baselines and success criteria for closing educational gaps have been agreed.

15. Impact against the 2012 milestone targets contained within the CtG Strategy was reported in the previous six monthly review report to Children and Young People's Committee on 3 December 2012. No further performance data will be available until December 2013.

Other Options Considered

16. No other options were considered.

Reason for Recommendations

17. Early impact data shows that the CtG Strategy is having a positive impact on narrowing the gaps for pupils eligible for free school meals. In addition, the early outcomes of collaborative working at County and locality level indicate that the CtG Strategy is beginning to develop new ways of working focused on earlier intervention to close gaps and ensure vulnerable learners meet their potential. As a result of this early success, the Strategy requires continued support from the Children and Young People's Committee.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Equalities Implications

19. Due regard has been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) notes the success of the Closing the Gap Strategy after its first year of implementation.
- 2) continues to monitor the Strategy by receiving six-monthly review reports.

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Constitutional Comments

20. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (KLA 14/05/13)

21. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

A Strategy for Closing the Nottinghamshire Educational Gaps – report to County Council on 29 March 2012

A Strategy for Closing the Educational Gaps in Nottinghamshire – six monthly review – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 3 December 2012

Nottinghamshire School Admission Arrangements 2014 – 2015 (includes approval of Fair Access Protocol) – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 11 March 2013.

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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