



meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 16 December 2004

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION

Annual Audit Commission survey

Each year the Audit Commission undertakes a national survey of schools' views on the effectiveness of LEA services. The survey is important feedback for the Education Department, enabling it to judge schools' satisfaction levels and benchmark the effectiveness of its services against the national picture. The survey asks schools to grade LEA services and functions with 70 questions asked in all. The outcomes of the survey are used to inform improvement plans for each year.

In the 2004 schools judge that Nottinghamshire LEA's services have continued to improve. The LEA has 51% of its services graded in the top quartile nationally and 85% in the top two quartiles. Many services are judged by schools to be good or very good. Services and functions that are very highly rated include strategic planning, the leadership of senior officers, communication with schools, budget planning and the quality of financial and pupils' performance data. Key school improvement functions are also very highly rated including LEA support for literacy and numeracy, for developing schools' self-evaluation and the monitoring, support and evaluation functions across all schools. There are no LEA services judged by schools to be poor.

The Audit Commission survey of schools has been carried out in Nottinghamshire for five years and there has been steady year-on-year improvement in all the main areas of the LEA's work. This year 73% of services show an increased score when compared with the 2003 survey.

Creative Partnerships

Members will recall being introduced to Creative Partnerships in my report to County Council at its meeting of 26 June 2003. Since then the development of the Ashfield, Mansfield and Bolsover Creative Partnerships has been progressing.

Creative Partnerships is a government funded programme through Arts Council England that aims to give school children in deprived areas throughout England the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and participate in cultural activities. Its vision is based on developing long-term partnerships between schools and cultural and creative organisations. These include museums, architects, theatre companies, historic buildings, dance studios, orchestras, website designers, artists and many others across the public, voluntary and private sectors.

Nottinghamshire benefits in Phase 3 of the national roll-out of Creative Partnerships by the placing of one in the former coalfield areas of Ashfield, Mansfield and Bolsover as the first ever cross-border CP in a non-urban environment.

An initial meeting took place in May of this year between representatives of the two local education authorities and the three district councils involved. From this a smaller working group was formed to begin the process of recruiting a Creative Director, instigating scoping research, finding a Chair for the Local Partnership Board and organising a reception/launch for practising professional artists based in the three areas.

The first round of recruitment for the post of Creative Director took place in the summer of this year but did not yield sufficient applications for a suitable field. The post was re-advertised this autumn and Christopher Batstone, currently Head of Community Development at the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Wakefield was appointed.

The Ashfield, Mansfield, Bolsover Creative Partnerships was successfully launched to professional artists working in the region at a reception held at Bolsover Castle in November led by Peter Knott, Director of Arts and Development, Arts Council England East Midlands supported by Ruth Tehran from Creative Partnerships National Office and officers from both local education authorities.

The new Creative Director will take up the role in January 2005 and will immediately have to recruit the rest of the team and establish the office; work closely with the working group on establishing the criteria for school involvement; have dialogue with schools and put all the procedures and mechanisms in place for work to begin in schools from September 2005.

GCSE results

GCSE results for Nottinghamshire schools have improved when compared to last year. In 2004, 48% of pupils achieved five or more high grade passes at GCSE locally compared with 47% of pupils last year. The average point score result which measures the performance of all pupils at GCSE has also increased from 40.9 in 2003 to 41.4 in 2004. Despite these improvements the performance of Nottinghamshire pupils in GCSE examinations remains below the national average in both measures. Raising standards for sixteen-year-olds is of the highest priority and there is a very detailed and rigorous improvement programme in place to achieve this. The activities currently undertaken include targeted work with lower performing schools, work with schools to improve teaching and learning and curriculum leadership and work

to help schools improve pupils' attendance. At the annual meeting between the LEA and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) the DfES team acknowledged that the LEA was working in a sensible and appropriate way with schools to raise standards and that the actions planned were likely to bring about improvements.

Including Parents Conference

The Inclusion Support Service held its annual conference for parents and carers of children with complex additional needs at Bestwood Lodge Hotel on 3 November 2004. A total of 105 parents and carers of children attended, with the event being significantly over subscribed. The keynote speaker was Professor Gervase Phinn, writer and broadcaster, and delegates were able to attend two out of a possible four workshops on a range of practical subjects. The day's activities concluded with a presentation entitled "Listening to Children" by pupils of West Bridgford Junior School.

Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, with many parents requesting further opportunities to attend such events. Comments such as: "I feel encouraged and re-inspired to carry on", "a fabulous and amazing insight into many problems- thank you so much" and "I want all my family and my child's teachers to hear what I have heard today" made the event very rewarding and worthwhile for all who worked so hard to make it a success.

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL STOREY

Cabinet Member for Education

M19C1230