

3 December 2012**Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER, SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS SERVICE****A STRATEGY FOR CLOSING THE EDUCATIONAL GAPS IN
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE – SIX MONTHLY REVIEW****Purpose of the Report**

1. To present a review of the impact of the first six months 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).

Key actions taken over the first six months of the CtG Strategy

4. The key actions identified in the plan have been completed on time.
5. **A cross phase and cross service CtG Performance Board has been established.** This Board will meet on a termly basis to review the contribution each Local Authority service is making to closing the educational gaps and will provide the evidence for impact reports to the Children and Young People's Committee. It will also oversee a programme of professional development for all staff across Children, Family and Cultural Services which will ensure the sharing of effective practice for supporting vulnerable children and their families. The programme will also enable collaborative working of key partners to impact faster on the achievement of children and young people eligible for free school meals.

6. **Data sets have been further developed at individual school and County level** so that school leaders and governors are aware of their success over the last five years in narrowing the gaps for pupils eligible for free school meals. Schools are able to compare their success rates with national averages and are using this data to target Pupil Premium funding on interventions to increase the progress of vulnerable learners. Education Improvement Advisers are working closely with schools across Nottinghamshire to use this data to plan for improved progression of vulnerable learners.
7. The majority of schools across Nottinghamshire have accessed **guidance and/or training on effective strategies to close educational gaps** either through head teacher briefings, governor training sessions, the Closing the Gap Leadership Conference in February 2012, or middle leader development programmes. Evaluations indicate that all participants have benefited from access to these opportunities. The success is also evidenced in the 'take-up' of the 2012-13 programmes and bespoke requests for follow-up support.
8. **A Closing the Gap locality-based pilot (2012-14) has been successfully launched in Newark Town.** This involves the majority of primary schools, the special school, both secondary schools and the post-16 provider in Newark. A range of local officers working on behalf of children and families in Newark are actively involved in the delivery of pilot activities. Other partners also include Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottingham Trent University and national agencies such as the National Literacy Trust.
9. A **Listening Activity** has now been completed and analysed as part of the initial CtG pilot work being carried out in Newark Town. This has provided a useful insight into the views of vulnerable pupils and their parents/carers to ensure that actions taken within this pilot will make the biggest difference to children's examination outcomes and life chances.
10. The outcomes from this listening activity are now informing the way in which Children's Centres, schools and other partners work collaboratively to trial new strategies and ways of working to improve the progress of vulnerable learners within Newark schools. There is a **major focus on literacy skills development as well as supporting vulnerable learners at key transition points.**
11. **Nottingham Trent University** has been commissioned to act as an external evaluation partner for the Newark pilot and will provide regular review feedback to schools and local services at each phase of implementation as well producing a final evaluation report.
12. **A range of opportunities have been secured to work collaboratively with external strategic partners on the CtG Strategy as follows:**
 - Nottinghamshire's Education Improvement Service has successfully secured £70,000 funding from the **Education Endowment Foundation to pilot the implementation of a targeted literacy intervention programme** for Year 7 pupils in up to 20 secondary schools. This programme is likely to impact on up to 400 pupils who have entered secondary school with achievement below age-related expectations. The pilot will be delivered by Local Authority advisers and consultants working with the Education Endowment Foundation as an external evaluation partner.

- Nottinghamshire Local Authority has also been invited to take part in a national **‘Communication Leaders’ pilot** jointly delivered by the Education Improvement Service and local Speech and Language Therapists, in partnership with The Communications Trust and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- Finally, a partnership is now in place with the **National Literacy Trust** to deliver a joint programme to support Looked After Children and their carers to develop good reading habits including the use of their local libraries.

Impact against the 2012 milestone targets contained within the CtG Strategy

13. **Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) milestone target for 2012:** reduce the attainment gap between children eligible for FSM and their peers achieving a good level of development to **17.5%**

Impact:

The attainment of children eligible for FSM in EYFS increased in 2012 for the third successive year by 4%. The attainment of children not eligible for FSM also increased by 9%. Hence the Nottinghamshire gap widened in 2012 even though the attainment of both groups has improved. Nottinghamshire’s gap currently stands at 23.7%.

14. **Key Stage 2 milestone target for 2012:** reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM pupils achieving the expected level in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 to **20%**

Impact:

The attainment of pupils eligible for FSM in Key Stage 2 improved by 7.8% from 2011 to 2012. The attainment of non FSM pupils also improved by 3%. This represents a significant narrowing of the gap between FSM pupils and non FSM pupils (from 25.4% gap in 2011 to 20.5% gap in 2012). This is the smallest gap achieved by Nottinghamshire’s primary schools in the past five years and is in line with the national gap for 2011.

This means that for first time in recent history, over two thirds of Nottinghamshire’s pupils eligible for FSM are entering Year 7 with the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to access the secondary curriculum, maximise their learning and improve their life chances.

15. **Key Stage 4 milestone target for 2012:** reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM pupils achieving the expected level at Key Stage 4 (5+ A*-C grades including English and mathematics) to **30.5%**

Impact:

The attainment of Nottinghamshire’s FSM pupils improved again for the fifth year in succession with 32.2% of FSM students gaining 5+A*-C including English and mathematics in 2012 compared with 27.4% in 2011.

The gap in attainment between FSM and non FSM pupils achieving the expected level at Key Stage 4 reduced by 2% from 2011 to 2012. This means that Nottinghamshire's FSM/non FSM gap has narrowed for the third year in succession.

Other Options Considered

16. No other options were considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

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. As a result of this early success, the Strategy requires continued support from the Children and Young People's Committee.
18. The success of Nottinghamshire County Council's bid to the Education Endowment Fund is an acknowledgement that this Strategy has the potential to be scaled up to positively improve outcomes across the County and region.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, 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.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) notes the success of the Closing the Gap Strategy during its first phase 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 (NDR 09/11/12)

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.

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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