



Executive Summary

Introduction

The Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee of Nottinghamshire County Council agreed to undertake a review into attainment and target levels within Nottinghamshire schools at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Data showed that on average from 2001-2004, Nottinghamshire had been ranked against its 10 statistical neighbours, approximately 7th in English at Key Stage 2, 6th in Maths at Key Stage 2 and 5th in science at Key Stage 2. They went on to reveal however that at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 Nottinghamshire ranked bottom (11th) across all disciplines.

The Select Committee wanted to investigate this decline and attempt to provide an explanation for it by considering the current attainment levels and transition arrangements operating across Nottinghamshire schools; examining “successful” Nottinghamshire schools and promoting good practice across the school fraternity; and liaising with statistical neighbours to identify good practice elsewhere and to suggest recommendations to Cabinet regarding using this practice within Nottinghamshire.

Key themes emerging from Nottinghamshire school visits

10 key themes were identified from the Study Group’s visits to 4 Nottinghamshire schools. These were : low expectations arising from having a large number of former coalfield areas, a lack of an integrated vocational education programme, poor dissemination of good practice, poor pupil behaviour, an inability to recruit staff to advertised vacancies, poor quality staffing, the use of workforce remodelling to effect change, a perception of comparatively low funding, ad hoc transitional arrangements for primary students entering secondary colleges and a perceived historical lack of support from the LEA.

Derbyshire and Durham school visits

2 Derbyshire and 2 Durham schools were visited and asked questions surrounding the 10 key themes and how they tackled each in turn. A number of similarities were found but a number of differences were also highlighted.

Recommendations

A list of recommendations have been provided for the consideration of Cabinet and the LEA in an attempt to try and raise the performance of Nottinghamshire schools across the board in comparison with our statistical neighbours

Introduction

The Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee of Nottinghamshire County Council agreed to undertake a review into attainment and target levels within Nottinghamshire schools at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

The review was triggered by a scrutiny report presented at the Select Committee meeting of 18 October 2005 which detailed Nottinghamshire schools' performance against that of its 10 statistical neighbours (Cheshire, Derbyshire, Essex, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Sussex, Worcestershire). The report presented information that showed performances of each of the statistical neighbours across the English, Maths and Science streams at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The figures showed that on average from 2001-2004 Nottinghamshire had been ranked against its 10 statistical neighbours approximately 7th in English at Key Stage 2, 6th in Maths at Key Stage 2 and 5th in Science at Key Stage 2. They went on to reveal however that at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 Nottinghamshire ranked bottom (11th) across all disciplines.

The Select Committee wanted to investigate this decline and attempt to provide an explanation for it. It was felt that initially the Study Group should focus on Nottinghamshire schools to give it an evidence based background on which to base its questions in the second part of its scrutiny review where it would visit statistical neighbour's schools for comparison. The Study Group was charged with the task of seeking out and promoting good practice within Nottinghamshire schools, making a valid comparison with statistical neighbour schools and providing the Select Committee with some suggestions on using good practices from outside the county into our schools.

Membership

Membership of the Study Group comprised :

Councillor Martin Suthers (Chair)
Councillor Philip Owen
Councillor Yvonne Woodhead
Councillor Kevan Wakefield
Mr David Richards

Support for the group was provided by :

Chris Gilbert, Scrutiny Officer, Chief Executive's Department, Nottinghamshire County Council;
Mike West, Inspector, Education Department, Nottinghamshire County Council
Philippa Hadfield, Administration Officer, Education Department, Nottinghamshire County Council

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Study Group were agreed by the Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee on 6 December 2005 as :

1. To consider the current attainment levels and transition arrangements operating across Nottinghamshire schools;
2. To examine “successful” Nottinghamshire schools and to promote good practice across the school fraternity;
3. To liaise with statistical neighbours to identify good practice elsewhere and to suggest recommendations to Cabinet regarding using this practice within Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire schools visited

Carlton Le Willows; Headteacher - Michael Naisbitt
Garibaldi ; Headteacher - Elaine Huckerby
Sherwood Hall ; Headteacher - Paul O'Brien
Valley Comprehensive ; Headteacher - Brian Rossiter

Derbyshire schools visited

The Bolsover School ; Headteacher - Kevin Dean
Aldercar Community Language College ; Headteacher - Tony Cooper

Durham schools visited

Spennymoor Comprehensive School ; Headteacher – Ken Hall
Durham Community Business College ; Deputy Headteacher – Trevor Dunn

Methodology

The Study Group undertook its evidence gathering on the following timetable :

Thursday 3 November	-	1 st EDP Study Group meeting
Tuesday 6 December	-	2 nd EDP Study Group meeting
Tuesday 20 December	-	3 rd EDP Study Group meeting
Tuesday 10 January	-	4 th EDP Study Group meeting
Wednesday 1 February	-	Carlton-le-Willows school visit
Thursday 2 February	-	Garibaldi school visit
Tuesday 7 February	-	Sherwood Hall school visit
Thursday 16 February	-	Valley Comprehensive school visit
Tuesday 21 February	-	5 th EDP Study Group meeting
Wednesday 1 March	-	Bolsover, Derbyshire school visit
Thursday 2 March	-	Aldercar, Derbyshire school visit
Tuesday 14 March	-	Durham schools' visit
Thursday 30 March	-	6 th EDP Study Group meeting
Monday 10 April	-	7 th EDP Study Group meeting
Tuesday 25 April	-	Final report submitted to Select Committee

Situation in Nottinghamshire

General

1. The Study Group undertook to visit four Nottinghamshire schools to see first hand the challenges that were being faced on a daily basis. The schools were chosen as far as possible to provide a cross section of achievement levels within the County. The Study Group recognised that whilst visiting only four schools may not be an accurate representation of the entire picture across Nottinghamshire, time constraints and the need to visit other Counties' schools limited their ability to visit more schools.
2. Members attended Carlton-le-Willows on Wednesday 1 February, Garibaldi on Thursday 2 February, Sherwood Hall on Tuesday 7 February and Valley Comprehensive on Thursday 16 February 2006. At each of the visits Members met with the Head Teacher, staff and representatives of the schools' governing body. The Study Group were also given a tour of the school by its students allowing members the opportunity to interact with the children currently within the system that was being reviewed (Appendix 1 lists those students that provided their time to lead Members on the tours).
3. The Study Group found all of the Nottinghamshire schools to be most receptive of their visit. Head Teachers were well aware of the problems facing schools across the County and were open and frank in providing details of their major challenges and possible solutions either from a local level by the school and its networks or from a central level via the local authority itself.
4. The issues raised were all very relevant. However on a number of occasions the reasons put forward for poor performance were not ones that Members felt were unique to Nottinghamshire. That is, whilst it was agreed that these problems existed and needed to be tackled the Study Group were unconvinced that statistical neighbour schools would not be facing exactly the same problems yet still performing markedly better at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Key Themes emerging from Nottinghamshire school visits

Low expectations of community

5. The most commonly raised issue was the fact that Nottinghamshire had an abundance of former coalfield areas, where community expectation and morale was very low, behaviour poor and attendance sporadic. This is a common theme running throughout the school fraternity which also permeates up through the local authority itself. There is no doubt that this issue is a serious one and is both complex and deeply rooted making it difficult to treat and fix. In a scrutiny review completed in February 2005 on the performance of schools in coalfield areas it was clear that the problems unique to these communities had been identified and that strategies were being implemented specifically targeted to these regions (A copy of the report can be found at www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk by following the county council diary link to the February 2005 Select Committee meeting).

6. However the Study Group posed the question that other counties, mostly linked with us as statistical neighbours, also had coalfield areas with presumably the exact same issues as those faced in Nottinghamshire yet their schools were still doing better. This became the essence of the Study Group's investigations. Former coalfield areas schools were hindered unquestionably by historical events but Nottinghamshire coalfields were considered no different to other coalfields around the UK and therefore could not be used as a reason for poor performance across counties for comparison. Within the County, the Study Group were convinced that these schools were starting from a position behind a number of other districts. However across county borders, as this review would focus on, they could not be used as a reason for poor performance and attainment levels if counties they were being compared to had as many, or in some cases more, like areas.
7. The Study Group were slightly confused by the national government's grouping of certain counties with Nottinghamshire as 'statistical neighbours'. A report was provided breaking down the factors on which these groupings were made which whilst seeming reasonably logical did not necessarily compare like with like. Given that the county having a large number of former coalfield areas was given as the key reason for underachievement, the Study Group decided to visit Derbyshire as a statistical neighbour and also to travel to Durham. Although Durham was not included as a statistical neighbour on the original report to the Education and Lifelong Learning Select Committee it was deemed appropriate to gather evidence from that county because of its high concentration of coalfield areas. This fact, coupled with Durham's recent rapid improvement in results, meant that the Study Group could directly compare a coalfield community and be able to pick out whatever good practice was occurring there attributing to the rise in attainment levels.

Vocational education

8. Another widespread belief held by all schools the Study Group visited was that of an inappropriate curriculum. It was generally considered that the curriculum being taught today, particularly at a secondary level, is outdated, inappropriate and irrelevant for the student of 2006. Today's curriculum should be more functional, for example maths students should be taught how to shop around and then balance a mortgage not how to memorise the formula for working out the volume of water carried in a cone. Likewise one Headteacher asked the question why they had to schedule a compulsory French Year 11 class for boys whom showed no interest and would most likely have little need for it upon leaving school? Curriculum influences children's motivation at school and this was one example of where it was doing precisely the opposite of what it should.
9. Key Stage 4 was identified as a crucial area for curriculum overhaul. It was generally felt that whilst some initiatives had been undertaken curriculum change at Key Stage 4 needed to be a much bigger priority and undertaken more rapidly. A positive change offering students courses of genuine interest were required and this would require significant support and funding from the LEA and national government.
10. Vocational education programmes was seen as something that could be offered both reasonably rapidly and sometimes at a low cost. The schools the Study Group visited however had not really engaged with this

ideal and claimed that there had been little support and drive to do so from the LEA. Sporadic courses had been offered within schools with no strategy or sustainability necessarily built into their operation. One school for instance had recognised the food industry as a major growth industry in their area and had introduced a course on it but it was purely a local initiative. By engaging with local businesses to assist with costs and materials the school was able to keep costs down yet run a course that assisted the local community, the school itself and most importantly serviced the needs of the students effectively. Members were keen to compare how statistical neighbours had embraced the concept of vocational education as a means to stimulate student achievement and retain students within the education system. Generally the Study Group found that Nottinghamshire was not doing anywhere near enough on this issue and the work that was being done was piecemeal, not joined up and not disseminated to the wider Nottinghamshire school fraternity.

Pupil behaviour

11. Pupil behaviour was cited as another major reason for Nottinghamshire's poor performance. Again however, the Study Group wondered how this could be used as a reason for poor performance against other county's schools as surely they must also have disruptive students. Similarly to the issue regarding former coalfield areas, certain schools had more of a discipline problem than others and that definitely affected performance but across county borders the Study Group were unconvinced that they would find any difference in numbers nor in manner of disruptive students. However the Study Group was most interested in seeing how different schools handled the discipline issue given that it was obviously a key impact on a cohort's results.
12. Many schools felt that the inappropriate curriculum choices offered to students as outlined earlier were tied to poor behaviour. Non engaged students often lead to poor classroom discipline as attention wandered and students failed to see the point of learning the particular subject on offer. One child can disrupt a whole class and ten or so in a single cohort can drastically reduce attainment levels even of those students willing to learn,
13. The schools' response to Nottinghamshire's policy of inclusion was mixed. Some schools supported the principles of inclusion but were concerned that no funding came with the policy directive. Other schools felt that some students would benefit more from being educated in an alternative setting. Schools generally had a poor opinion of the LEA and were seeking more support in dealing with disruptive pupils. One Headteacher commented that he had gone as far afield as Dorset to gain some insight into good practice in managing unruly pupils.

Dissemination of good practice

14. In a scrutiny review completed in April 2005 on the dissemination of good practice amongst schools it was revealed that Nottinghamshire was improving in this regard but still could do more. The report specifically targeted the sharing of good practice between county schools and found that it was best at the primary school level. (A copy of the report can be found at www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk by following the county council diary link to the April 2005 Select Committee meeting). For the purposes of this review the Study Group wanted to know of information sharing

both within Nottinghamshire but more importantly across county borders, focusing primarily on the secondary sector which historically were poorer at sharing the information.

15. The Study Group were extremely disappointed to find that despite the best intentions of schools and the LEA, the sharing of good practice across county borders was virtually non-existent. It appeared that schools felt that the LEA's service in this regard stopped at alerting schools to upcoming conferences, exhibitions or training courses. It did not actively seek out best practice from around the country nor did it provide funding to cover staff absences or the commitment in time from possible candidates. The only way good practice was being shared at present was between schools in close geographic proximity that happened to meet together for whatever purpose discussing things they had seen or heard. Schools complained that the lack of time available to staff to attend these courses prevented them from learning from other authorities. Schools had suggested common Inset days to facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practice between schools and this was happening in some areas but not uniformly across the County. The Study Group understands that plans are underway for this to happen within the primary sector.
16. Likewise the sharing of expertise was not taking place evenly between schools within -the county. There seemed to be no identification of schools that were doing something well that could be shared with other schools, surely a role that the LEA should be providing or if its providing should be doing better. Schools commented that a "culture of secrecy within schools. If you don't know where the good practice is how do you go and learn from it". They felt that if the asked for help the bigger or better performing schools would poach their best students. The introduction of competition between schools in the early to mid 1990's had made schools wary of sharing good practice and it was felt shut off many of the information channels that schools had had prior to this time. The Study Group felt it imperative that this culture within County schools was eradicated as an item of extreme urgency.
17. The Study Group did find evidence that school networks were beginning to assist in this thawing of relations between schools with examples of science networks and English networks being established within families of schools. These were not LEA initiatives though and no guidance had been provided regarding where to locate best practice. Rather they had been more unstructured discussions involving schools "just turning up and talking to each other".
18. The Study Group was disappointed that secondary schools were not supportive of the concept of advanced skills teachers. They felt that whilst they may be good pollinators of ideas between and across schools, they also spent some of their time on outreach programmes and thus the school could not use there expertise for 100% of the time. The Study Group understood the issues that individual schools were making but were most concerned that the bigger picture was being missed and felt that the LEA should do more to promote these roles.

Recruitment of staff

19. The recruitment of staff was also raised as a problem for schools which impacted on pupil performance. Whilst recognising the problem the Study Group felt again that this was not a problem solely facing this county and was keen to discover what other county's schools did to tackle it. There is no doubt that plans need to be put in place immediately to tackle the issue. The teaching workforce is growing older and this problem is exacerbated by the fact that student teacher numbers have fallen significantly.
20. Schools reported that they had had vacancies where not a single candidate had applied and in one case had received just a single application for a Head of Maths Department role. Many schools believed that the national recruitment strategy was not good, as government had once paid people to leave the service thinking there were too many teachers, only now to find that there weren't enough. Schools had tackled this problem internally by encouraging "homegrown" teachers from within their current crop of students. A number of schools had managed to successfully attract ex-students back to their school to teach and the Study Group were impressed by schools' continuing drive to encourage this flow of would-be teachers back into the system.

Quality of staffing

21. The Study Group felt that there was a clear message from the school visits that the attitude of teachers was more important to attainment rather than catchment areas and condition of school buildings. Class sizes were not seen as a major factor affecting performance despite the media interest in it, quality teaching was considered far more important. As one school stated, "the quality of the person standing in front of the class is critical". The continuance of teachers was also raised as being very important to ensure attainment within a school was on target.
22. Some discussion was had with schools regarding where it placed its stronger teachers within the school system and likewise where it placed its weaker or newer teachers. Most agreed that in general the school probably did place its weakest teachers at Year 7 and 8 feeling that Key Stage 4 results were of paramount importance to the school and therefore requiring their best teachers. It was suggested that this weakened any transition programmes that the school had in place, meaning that the 'dip' in performance at Years 7 and 8 may not be able to be recovered by Years 9 and 10. Schools were well aware of this potential problem and the Study Group was heartened to see schools having processes in place to closely monitor and track student performance through the early secondary years.

Workforce remodelling

23. The workforce remodelling programme that was being rolled out to schools from the national government has as its basic premise that teachers prime role should be to teach the children. They should not be caught up in the assorted other tasks that the modern teacher seemed to have to deal with on a daily basis. The Study Group felt that workforce remodelling should be seen as a positive opportunity by schools to restructure their school staffing in an attempt to remove the unwanted 'add-ons' from a teachers workload. In general the Study Group felt that workforce remodelling was being seen in a positive light by Nottinghamshire schools. Although some were not very far down the

track in implementing these changes, some excellent initiatives were being planned which would benefit the teaching profession within schools.

24. The programme would have to be managed closely however as there was the possibility that some teachers enjoyed being able to spend some of their time away from the classroom engaged in other activities with children and that we did not want to make the teaching profession too 'teaching intensive'. Having to teach 25/30 periods a week with no 'downtime' is risky and may not make the teaching profession attractive to young people choosing occupations from school. To be truly successful it was felt that workforce remodelling needed adequate financing and quality intensive teachers coming out of colleges.

Poorly funded

25. It was evident to the Study Group that Nottinghamshire schools held the belief that they were poorly funded in comparison with other schools across the UK. However figures received by Members from the LEA refute this assumption as Durham receives slightly more funding per pupil but Derbyshire receives slightly less. In fact figures seen by the Study Group show that Nottinghamshire is statistically the third most well funded shire authority in England for individual school budgets per pupil.
26. Headteachers in general were becoming very aware of other funding streams outside of their generic budget that could be tapped into on a year to year basis. The Study Group felt though that Headteachers were often working independently in this aspect both fearing that other schools would also tap into the same funding stream leaving their school with less and simply not recognising what other streams were available. Schools were well versed in identifying local opportunities for financial assistance but the Study Group were of the opinion that the LEA should take a more proactive role in both locating and alerting applicable schools to other funding streams, particularly those of a national or in some cases an international level.
27. The Study Group agreed that the school buildings they saw on their visits around Nottinghamshire were generally of a poor standard and that this could be a minor contributing factor to poor performance. The news that a raft of Nottinghamshire schools had been placed on the next wave of the Building Schools of the Future programme was well received and considered vital in lifting morale of both teaching staff and children alike.

Transition programmes

28. The transition of a student between a primary school where he/she may have spent 7 years of their life into a secondary school which is often more crowded and diverse is a very important part of schooling. The Study Group formed an opinion at a very early stage that the dramatic drop in performance between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 within Nottinghamshire could be related to poor transitional arrangements between schools.
29. On the school visits it was found that secondary colleges did find transition a problem when they were taking pupils from a large number of feeder schools. It was discovered that programmes were generally well established between the larger primary schools and the major secondary

schools in any particular area. Smaller and more rural primary schools were more difficult to provide a smooth transition programme for but given the small number of students involved this was not considered to be a major factor in relation to poor performance. Transition programmes investigated included prospectus' being provided at Year 6 in September, Heads visiting primary schools in the area informally, Head of Year 7 visits with social worker support and various forms of induction days. In addition the Study Group were told of Year 6 programmes being established in areas where the secondary college specialised meaning that students were using facilities prior to Year 7, Year 6 express Maths programmes and monthly meetings of family of schools groups.

30. The Study Group found that many schools were providing a Cognitive Assessment Test (CAT) to their new intake of Year 7s within the first 3 weeks of term 1. This test along with various primary school scholastic information was then used to plot a student's progress across the next 6 years of schooling. The Study Group were concerned however that perhaps the CAT test would be better given further into term 1. It was well recognised that students had 'forgotten' a lot of what they had learned as they started Year 7 having just had a 6 week long summer break. Therefore would a CAT test given early in term one give an under-representation of students ability compared to one given later when the student was back 'in the swing' of schooling?
31. Curriculum was again identified as a problem. For example many schools commented that students were arriving at secondary school with strong information technology skills having used the latest equipment and software at primary school for a number of years. Upon reaching secondary level however students were being taught the raw basics of computing on an outmoded model using outdated software, thereby actually going backwards! Conversely the English programme had for some years used a textbook that students carried over between Year 6 and Year 7. This was regarded as an excellent innovation and one that other subjects should use as a model of good practice by developing similar textbooks or curriculum projects that were continued across transition.
32. Overall however, given that the Study Group had initially believed transition programmes to be the single most prevalent cause of poor performance at Key Stage 3 in Nottinghamshire schools, the reality was that difficulties at transition were probably being over-emphasised. Whilst problems existed, many good programmes were already in place or being planned that were ensuring the smoothest possible transition for students in county schools.

LEA Support

33. Another key issue emerging from the school visits was the perception of support provided by the LEA. Within Nottinghamshire there was a clear feeling that support provided by the LEA was in inverse proportion to a school's success. In other words the more success a school had with its attainment levels the less support it received from the LEA. As one school believed, "money follows failure, not success". Whilst this concept is not necessarily a bad policy it is a flawed one. Too much emphasis was being placed on trying to raise the standard of schools at the bottom of the county performance chart, thereby largely ignoring the gains that

could be made from encouraging successful schools to reach even higher thus also lifting the average performance. The Study Group believes that a clear statement from the LEA is required emphasising that top performing schools needed to strive higher in addition to the bottom needing to improve.

34. The experiences of the schools the Study Group visited was that senior management of the LEA was disconnected from the reality of schools but that this was now changing due to the LEA employing more teachers. In general schools did feel that the LEA was providing a worthwhile service to them. Some particular instances were recorded though where the LEA was perceived as failing included the lack of feedback from the LEA once an initiative was up and running, a heavy emphasis on implementing new programmes with no evaluation of programmes already being run, no budget benchmarking and that an immediate investment was required into Key Stage 4 information technology.

In summary

35. Following the completion of its Nottinghamshire school visits the Study Group met again to finalise its list of key themes that had emerged and to generate questions on them to ask schools external to the county. The ten themes identified were the key issues the Study Group believed may be contributing factors to Nottinghamshire's poor performance. Although many of these issues may not be necessarily unique to Nottinghamshire and therefore not part of the reason for its poor performance against its statistical neighbours, the Study Group wanted to investigate how other authority's schools tackled them with a view to deciding if better management could be a contributing factor to improving performance.
36. It was agreed that questions would be asked regarding local community expectations, the use of vocational education programmes, the management of poor pupil behaviour, how good practice was being disseminated, the recruitment of staff, the quality of staffing, workforce remodelling, the comparison of funding levels, the use of transition programmes and the level of support received from the LEA.

Derbyshire and Durham school visits

Local community expectations

37. The Study Group noted that even though the schools they visited were in former coalfield areas this was never mentioned as a possible reason for failure. Whilst schools struggled with a lack of community involvement and low morale, it was seen as a retrograde step to focus on this and progress was being made in focusing staff, students and through them the community, toward the future.
38. Schools had actively engaged with the local media in a far more positive way than the Study Group found in Nottinghamshire and had taken great care to foster this relationship allowing the school to regularly promote its successes. Likewise the schools seemed to have more proactively linked with local businesses to provide support for vocational education programmes in particular, be it through funding, employment programmes or in the provision of materials.

39. The dynamism of the Headteacher and their senior management structures was another highlight for Members. In both of the County's visited there was a real 'can do' approach with a focus on the future and raising attainment levels. The historical negativity of some of the areas, which they must have faced, was not as self evident as it was in our county and certainly was never mentioned as a barrier to achievement.

Vocational Education

40. The Study Group were given a clear indication that other counties were far more advanced in introducing vocational education courses as an alternative to the mainstream GCSE curriculum. In addition the Study Group discovered that courses could be set up at a relatively low cost with the local community often willing to assist with the provision of materials for instance.
41. It was important to note that "vocational education should not be used as a management tool for poor behaviour", yet it was a solution being tried as an alternative to exclusion and the more traditional disciplinary route. The Study Group saw first hand the enthusiasm and work ethic of a group of students involved in a construction course during school hours, with the students not wanting to take their recess breaks in order to finish off their projects. Members were convinced that such dedication may not have been in evidence in a maths or science class!
42. Another advantage of a myriad of vocational education courses was that students were able to identify how subjects like maths were required in everyday work situations. Be it measuring lengths of pieces of wood or working out ampere in a particular circuit, teachers expressed to the Study Group an increased relevance of the main more mainstream subjects to those children. Whilst the Study Group would not advocate that vocational education courses should be made compulsory as one school had done for its students at Key Stage 4, it is of the firm belief that these courses engaged disaffected students, could be used as one tool in tackling pupil behaviour and opened opportunities both during and after schooling for children to move into the working environment. Courses designed to begin in school that lead straight into a local work situation were evident giving students a clear career path and future.
43. The Study Group noted the figures provided by the schools that there was a massive improvement in results at KS3 when vocational education is introduced as the pupils feel more engaged. Staff interviewed by the Study Group commended that they felt the biggest assistance was given to the middle tier of students who might have been trading water, as well as the bottom who were disengaged with a diet of GCSEs. Likewise it gave teachers the opportunity to focus more on the more gifted students and push them to excel.

Dissemination of good practice

44. Unsurprisingly Members found that there was little interaction between the Derbyshire schools they visited and the Nottinghamshire schools even though one of the Derbyshire schools had been used as an exemplar of good practice across that county. The Study Group wish to stress that lines on a map should not prevent dissemination of good practice and that schools being less than 10 miles from a major

Nottinghamshire town should offer those schools an opportunity to learn from good practice.

45. In general the Study Group was disappointed to hear that unlike Nottinghamshire, within Derbyshire and Durham there appeared on the surface much less competition and a real willingness to share experiences. Staff were also encouraged to visit other counties in search of good practice and given the authority to then implement these new initiatives into their school upon their return. All of the schools were unanimous in their praise of their LEAs both seeking out good practice to visit and then in providing assistance in embedding that good practice back into their own school.
46. Indeed Durham schools had taken the notion of co-operation one step further and formed their secondary schools into 'federations'. These federations appeared to willingly share teachers to cover key personnel short term absences with their own coverage coming from a pool of quality teachers from within a pool maintained by the LEA. This system seemed to work excellently and Members were left wondering if a similar type of system could not be used within our own county.

Pupil behaviour

47. This report has already touched on the usage of vocational education as one tool in managing poor behaviour, and probably the other programme that impressed Members on their visits were the usage of inclusion units. These units were stand alone buildings or offices where disruptive students were sent and managed in a one on one environment. The schools had gone further in most cases and the inclusion unit was also doubling up as a quiet room for students to catch up on late work and speak to pastoral care staff about any problems they may be facing. Schools were committed to these units and a budget was provided each year to continue their excellent work, approximately £70,000 per year from the excellence cluster funding.
48. Aside from inclusion units schools that were visited had installed or were in the process of installing electronic registration for students at the beginning of each lesson. Schools commented that single session truancy had been totally eliminated and day long truancy had been minimised as cases were recognised, reported and dealt with much more quickly. These systems are quite expensive to implement and can be seen as draconian by the media and the local community. Schools argued however that the benefits over a long period easily outweighed any negativity in the short term and had demonstrably assisted in keeping students at school, learning and thus producing better results particularly for those students at the bottom tier of attainment.
49. Members were also introduced to the "Learners Mark" system in one school where students were rated on a +2 down to -2 system for good work, poor behaviour etc, tied to a reward system. For instance students scoring above +1.7 were given a free school trip per year or as a +1.8 a free ticket to the prom. So called 'negative' learners had decreased from 40 to 3 as the system was embedded into the school psyche. Encouragingly the LEA had visited the school to view the initiative and had disseminated it to other schools, where it is now being used.

Recruitment of staff

50. Surprisingly none of the schools the Study Group visited external to the county mentioned recruitment as a problem. Without further investigation of raw data on vacancies vis-à-vis applications it is impossible to draw a realistic conclusion from this assertion. However Members were worried that the plethora of negative press that Nottinghamshire has received has led to it becoming a less favoured place for would-be teachers to come and work in.
51. One school has developed contacts with local universities to ensure good candidates in those areas required by the school are alerted to the school's needs and vice versa. This type of proactive relationship with local teaching colleges could be something that Nottinghamshire should invest more time in developing.

Quality of staffing

52. The Study Group found that in general schools were using similar programmes to ensure that the quality of its teaching staff remained as high as possible. Schools mentioned using ex-students back at the school to teach in the same manner as the Study Group found in Nottinghamshire. Again, quality staffing was pushed to the forefront as the key indicator for the success of a school with regard to attainment levels.

Workforce remodelling

53. Similarly to Nottinghamshire schools, workforce remodelling was in the main regarded as an opportunity for schools to implement some beneficial changes but that funding needed to be tied into making those changes. The Study Group did not find this issue to be handled any differently to what was discovered in our county schools.

Poorly funded

54. The Study Group did not find any significant differences in budgets provided for schools. Perhaps the biggest difference was that there was a clear perception that other LEAs worked more closely with schools in uncovering new funding streams and tapping into them than did Nottinghamshire LEA.
55. On the visit to Durham, Members were told that £2M had been provided by the LEA over a 3 year period resulting in each school having £80,000 to use with direct support from the LEA. That sort of funding injection would obviously be a great boost for Nottinghamshire schools and further work needed to be done to locate and draw down alternative funding streams.

Transitional programmes

56. Basically the transition programmes used by schools external of the county were very similar in nature and frequency to those that the Study Group found in Nottinghamshire. One of the big differences that was found was a transitional vocational education programme with the construction industry board where a bronze medal could be achieved in the summer holidays before starting school and immediately beginning work on the silver medal, thereby forming a continuous progression from the summer holidays into term 1.

57. The Study Group were impressed with Durham's usage of booster classes whereby schools were asked to nominate students they felt in need of extra revision. They would then attend revision classes outside of school hours taught by quality teachers from across the county. This was certainly one initiative that Members felt strongly could be tried in Nottinghamshire schools.

LEA Support

58. As already mentioned schools external of the county were in general very supportive of their LEAs. Support was considered to be given on a needs basis and dissemination of good practice was seen as effective with the LEA encouraging schools to visit those identified as having good practice both within their county and where need be externally. There was little or no interaction however with Nottinghamshire schools despite their close geographic proximity and similar socio-economic backgrounds.
59. In Durham the Study Group were informed that the 14% improvement in results in two years "may have happened without LEA, but had certainly been enhanced by what the LEA had done" with regards to advisor networks and a supportive network of head teachers. Headteachers professed to have a very close working relationship with the LEA and felt valued by them. They were grateful of the time and effort the LEA put into finding alternative funding streams for schools and in general how quickly matters were taken up and resolved with their assistance.

Other perceived differences

60. The Study Group noticed early in its visit schedule just how focused schools were on results, much more so than Nottinghamshire. For example at one school the Study Group were told that from day 1 of term 1 for Year 11s they were focused on exams. Coursework was completed by February, a revision conference for students was scheduled for March and an individualised timetable for students operated from May. These timetables mirrored the exam timetables meaning for example that if the history exam was scheduled for a Wednesday afternoon, for the 6-8 week prior to it students would be scheduled a history class on Wednesday afternoons. All study leave had basically been revoked keeping children at school for as long as possible. The schools were adamant that this was a success, pointing to a rise in attainment levels over the past two years but obviously this would be very difficult to quantify.
61. Other initiatives that the Study Group were briefed on included teachers performance management being tied to student achievement levels and the restructuring of school days to provide a long morning session and a shorter, sharper afternoon session where attention levels are dropping.
62. In Durham the Study Group were introduced to the Beyond Expectations Transformation Team (BETT) which was a large hands on support initiative and not top-down driven like most of the national initiatives. This team, lead by John Deller, was a programme designed to lift performance at Key Stage 4 throughout Durham and had worked wonders in its first years of operation. The Study Group were very impressed with the team's recognition within the schools they visited and the drive and enthusiasm to achieve inherent in the County. The consistency of practice for certain key aspects including coursework

mentors, curriculum planning, student-centred action, strategic placement of teachers and providing challenge against targets was self evident.

Recommendations

The Study Group believes that underlying all of the work that the LEA and schools are doing to raise attainment levels across the county there remains an unhealthy ethos of negativity within Nottinghamshire and its schools. Members are convinced that great things can, and will, be achieved by our schools and firmly recommends that the LEA and schools look positively to the future and work with each other to collectively lift our levels of performance.

Bearing in mind its terms of reference the Study Group recommends that :

1. That the LEA **actively** promote, and provide funding where possible, to establish a scheme of vocational education programmes across the county, working with local and national businesses and providers to achieve this goal.
2. That the LEA immediately investigate the failings in the dissemination of good practice between Nottinghamshire schools and across the country by :
 - 2.1 drawing up a county wide matrix of good practice for distribution to schools;
 - 2.2 alerting schools to good practice throughout the UK and encouraging visits by staff to view first hand;
 - 2.3 promoting our successes to encourage schools to visit Nottinghamshire as exemplars of good practice; and
 - 2.4 developing a schedule of "Inset" days to facilitate groups of like teachers being able to attend conferences and workshops to assist in learning from others' good practice.
3. That pupil behaviour is recognised by the LEA as a significant barrier to raising attainment levels and that :
 - 3.1 consideration be given to encouraging the implementation of the 'learners mark' system from Bolsover School in Derbyshire into all Nottinghamshire schools;
 - 3.2 urgent consideration be given to promoting the implementation of electronic registration/attendance systems for students universally across the county; and
 - 3.3 schools be encouraged to establish and maintain inclusion units with a variety of purposes.
4. That where possible the LEA continue to actively promote Nottinghamshire as a vibrant and dynamic place for young teachers to work.
5. That schools continue to recognise the importance of transition for students through the development of consistent curriculum, strengthening links through the family of schools programme and

continuing to recognise the importance of the early years of secondary schooling on children.

- 6.** That the LEA becomes better focused on lifting attainment by:
 - 6.1** supporting schools in focusing students on Key Stage 4 exams from day one of term one in Year 11;
 - 6.2** focusing itself on encouraging successful schools to aim even higher rather than being intent on solely trying to lift the most unsuccessful schools;
 - 6.3** implementing a series of booster classes on a countywide basis to be taught by identified excellent teachers from around the county.

Appendix 1 : Students who lead tours at Nottinghamshire schools

The Study Group would like to thank the following students for giving up their time to lead Members on a tour of their school :

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE:

Carlton le-Willows : Charlotte Ward, Jennifer Hancock and Toby Burgess

Garibaldi : Jessica Davis, Leanne Womack, Paul Haywood

Valley Comprehensive : Philip Chambers, Zac Collingham

DERBYSHIRE:

Bolsover : Katrina Walvin, Laura Woodley, Lisa Eville, Jamie Smith and Ashley Cheetham.