

**9 December 2013****Agenda Item:****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION STANDARDS AND  
INCLUSION****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 Nottinghamshire's Closing the Educational Gaps Strategy to date.

**Information and Advice****Context**

2. The Closing the Gap (CtG) Strategy was approved by Full 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 June 2013**

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 that each Local Authority (LA) service is making to close educational gaps and to hold each service to account for the impact of the work. The membership of the Board includes Group and Team Managers from across Children, Families and Cultural Service (CFCS) and in addition, Newark schools are now represented on the Board by a primary head teacher who provides feedback to the Board from the Newark schools' steering group. Staff from across these services and schools

have made significant contributions to the delivery of the strategy at universal and local levels. The Board has also overseen a programme of professional development for all staff across 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 included actions to contribute to educational gaps within their 2013-14 Commissioning Plans and teams have submitted a six monthly report on impact to date to the Board. The Closing the Gap Strategy has been included within Nottinghamshire's recently-launched Early Help Strategy.

7. The work and success of the Closing the Gap Strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive and creative data strategy, led by the **Performance Review Team** in partnership with the Education Improvement Service (EIS). This collaborative work ensures that a wide range of data is designed and used to identify areas of greatest need, areas for improvement and examples of good practice that can be shared and built upon. The data strategy is responsive and bespoke to needs as these emerge from the work of teams at local and County level. Most critically, it supports the evaluation of impact on closing educational gaps at school, area and County levels.
8. The majority of schools across Nottinghamshire have continued to access guidance and/or training on effective strategies to close educational gaps. The **Education Improvement Service (EIS)** has successfully designed and delivered an annual Closing the Gaps leadership conference for two consecutive years. Each event has been attended by over 150 delegates representing approximately 50% of Nottinghamshire primary and secondary schools. Feedback indicates that these events are much appreciated as they provide access to national and international speakers, latest research and innovative practice to close educational gaps. These conferences have been followed up through workshops at head teacher briefings and sold offer networks which have ensured that a significant proportion of senior leaders have led and driven closing the gap strategies at school, family of schools and local network levels across the county. This has also been achieved through the work of 10 cross County 'Raising Achievement Networks' (RAN) including 60 primary schools and 21 Professional Development clusters, each made up of approximately six primary schools within close geographical areas. Each of these networks is committed to carrying out action research in schools across the cluster to identify effective teaching and learning strategies to close educational gaps. Education Improvement Advisers allocated to schools which are not yet 'Good' using Ofsted criteria, provide support and challenge to senior leaders and governors to improve the progress of all children and young people including vulnerable learners.
9. Close collaboration between Nottinghamshire's EIS and the **Governing Body Services** has increased the range of opportunities to provide advice, support and training for Nottinghamshire governors to fulfil their enhanced accountability role in terms of monitoring the use of Pupil Premium funding to close gaps. Advice has been offered to governors through articles in the termly newsletter and Director's reports, and through the training opportunities in the 2013-14 sold offer. Governor services has ensured that the model agenda provided for governing bodies includes a specific item on monitoring gaps and the use of the Pupil Premium to reduce gaps at school level.

10. Good progress has been made on key actions taken by officers across **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy and Provision** teams. The newly formed **Primary Social and Emotional Development Team (PSED)** continues to develop capacity within schools to include vulnerable learners and support them to access learning. This team has increased in size as result of reducing provision in central Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Secondary schools have grouped together in well-developed School Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships (SBAPs) and have used their devolved funding to create innovative local solutions to meet the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). As a result, permanent exclusions across the County have halved in 2012-13, continuing a five year trend of improvement.
11. The **Admissions Team** continues to work closely with schools to ensure that the Fair Access Protocol (FAP) is used effectively and consistently across the County so that children and young people without a school place are rapidly offered an appropriate placement to maximize their time spent in learning. The team has ensured that the admissions and appeals codes are fully understood by all partners through information sent to all schools, head teacher briefings and briefings for key officers and elected members. The introduction of weekly monitoring of children without a school place has had a significant impact on reducing waiting times for FAP pupils. The average number of days lost to learning in 2012-13 is less than half the number in the previous year. In 2011-12, the longest waiting period for any young person without a school place was 467 days compared to 178 days in 2012-13. In addition, the LA rapidly put in place interim educational provision whilst the direction process was initiated.
12. **The Achievement and Equality Team (A&E)** has continued to promote the Stephen Lawrence Education Standard and the embedding of equality across Nottinghamshire's schools and children's centres. The sharing of good practice in relation to equalities work through networking and celebration events has resulted in those children's centres that have been assessed to date achieving level 1 status. Effective links have been made between schools, the A&E team, the School Place Planning and Targeted Support teams. This has enabled closer information-sharing about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people without a school place and built the LA's capacity to begin to remove barriers which currently impact adversely on successful engagement in learning.
13. Crime prevention services have now been integrated within the **Youth Justice Service (YJS)** and these officers are putting in place programmes for young people aimed at improving their attendance in full time educational provision by improving their English skills so that they can engage in their own learning upon re-integration to school or other educational settings. YJS is beginning to work collaboratively with the Targeted Support team to increase the attendance of young people currently in the youth justice system by supporting and challenging schools and other educational settings on the use of part-time timetables.
14. **Early Childhood Services** continue to make a significant and necessary contribution to Closing the Gap. The commissioned network of 58 children's centres work in collaboration with a range of multi-agency staff including midwives, health visiting teams, speech therapists, childcare and early education providers and schools. It is well understood and accepted that 'getting in early' is key to ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds make appropriate progress in their learning and thereby improve their life chances. These services focus on children aged 0-5 years and their

families, and now include 5-12 year olds to reflect our recently enhanced offer from children's centres. There are currently 45,200 0-5 year olds living in Nottinghamshire. This figure is likely to rise to 47,000 by 2021. 55% of these children are living in low income areas with at least 14% of 2 year olds identified as having additional Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). In 2013, 77% of all children living in low income areas were registered with one of Nottinghamshire's 58 children's centres and last year, 57% of them accessed children's centre services. 80% of those children's centres which have been inspected are Good or Outstanding according to Ofsted criteria. The Early Years Specialist Teacher Team provides focused support to settings requiring improvement and maintains oversight on performance and progress of children in their care.

15. **The 'Closing the Gaps' locality-based pilot centred around the schools, educational settings and children's centres in Newark** (2012-14) continues to gather strength and pace as it now enters its second year of innovative collaboration. Partners from across the town and nearby areas are working closely to seek out and implement new ways to support all learners (0-19 years), particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they journey through education.
16. **A Newark Town Steering Group** represents all partners across a wide 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. The Steering Group, in consultation with local head teachers, has recently filmed a short promotional DVD and also renamed this pilot the **"Together for Newark"** collaboration (TfN) as a reflection of the shared ownership and pride in collective achievements currently under development in the area. An end of Year 1 "Showcase" event was held in June 2013 and attended by over 60 people from local schools, services and the town council. Feedback from this event was extremely positive and leaders agreed that this event provided stimulus and continued 'sign up' for further and deeper collaboration in 2013-14.
17. Data sets have been further developed at locality level to inform the work of the Steering Group and various working groups. A **'TfN Vulnerable Learners Profiling Group'** made up of school and LA partners has now been formed and will take a lead role in developing and using 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.
18. **Collaborative action research activities continue to be developed across four key strands of investigation within the Newark CtG pilot based on the outcomes of the initial listening activity.** Each strand contains a number of working groups made up of school practitioners and appropriate LA specialists. These groups meet regularly to explore all issues and opportunities related to their strand of research and then plan and engage in various practical activities aimed at improving *all* learners' educational experiences and outcomes as well as 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 and Community Learning Service along with local libraries and Newark Town Council are currently working jointly to support local schools in story-telling activities and training. The achievement of all participants will be recognised in a cross- phase celebration and awards event hosted by Newark Town Council early next year.

19. Interim evaluations of the first year of the “Together for Newark” locality pilot have been carried out separately by researchers from **Nottingham Trent University and from the Centre for Equity in Education at Manchester University**. Early findings indicate that;

*“The great strength of TfN is that it has brought together and formed positive relationships between schools in the town and schools and other partners. Partners found the initial listening exercise valuable in helping to give the group a common identity/values/sense of purpose. TfN has generated a range of new activities which have helped to cement these relationships... This is a very positive foundation to build on.”*

Professor Alan Dyson and Dr Kirsten Kerr, Manchester University

*“Analysis of the interim evidence collected clearly identified that ‘Closing the Gaps for Vulnerable Learners: Piloting locality working in Newark Town’ has already made a positive impact on education provision and wider learning opportunities in Newark. Within a year, focused activities have led Newark’s schools and services to start to collectively address barriers, concerns and issues identified by local families and professionals.”*

Professor Gill Richards, Nottingham Trent University

20. **A range of CtG research projects has also been secured to enable schools across Nottinghamshire, with the support of the Education Improvement Service, to work collaboratively with other local and external strategic partners:**

- **“Switch On”** is an example of a Nottinghamshire literacy and communication intervention. It has been developed by our Every Child A Reader (ECAR) lead teachers working in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and evaluated by Birmingham University. Switch On is one-to-one literacy intervention based on the principles of Reading Recovery. It is personalised intervention, led by trained teaching assistants, targeted at the most vulnerable, underachieving pupils in KS1, 2 and now in KS3. In 2012-13, many of Nottinghamshire’s secondary schools were involved in a KS3 trial of “Switch On”. It has been proven to have a positive and sustainable impact.
- Nottinghamshire has been chosen as one of only four areas in England to take part in a two year national **‘Communication Leaders’ pilot** in partnership with The Communications Trust and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Members of Nottinghamshire’s Speech and Language Team and the Education Improvement Service will support primary and secondary pupils and their mentors from Newark schools to develop and evaluate an evidence-based approach whereby pupils take on leadership roles in communication within homes and school, as an innovative means of improving speech, language and communication development for pupils aged 11-19 years within their community.

- An innovative '**Multi-modal Literacy Project for Looked-After Children**' was introduced in Nottinghamshire in the autumn of 2013. This project aims to support over 40 Looked-After learners to improve their engagement in literacy and to encourage links between home and school through the use of multimodal texts and new technologies (specifically ipads). The technology will increase pupils' confidence in making individual choices and remove some of the barriers to communication. The project is being jointly led and evaluated by Nottinghamshire's Education Improvement Service, the Virtual School Team, and Dr Petula Bhojwani from Nottingham Trent University.
- **A three year community mentoring pilot** is underway 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.

### **Impact against the 2013 milestone targets contained within the CtG Strategy**

21. Over and above those **attainment targets** set within this strategy to close attainment gaps, it is also critical to monitor increases to **pupils' progression** across key stages in English and mathematics. This is because analysis against 'average' attainment outcomes measures only (L4+ English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 and 5+ A\*- C including English and mathematics at Key Stage 4) does not take into account the achievement of *all* learners from their starting points. It is the view of the CtG Performance Board that wider monitoring of progress measures ensures that the County Council also evaluates the impact of its Closing the Gaps Strategy on the achievement and life chances of *all* learners.
22. **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% with subsequent milestones agreed following the publication of the revised EYFS curriculum and assessment arrangements**

#### **Impact:**

57% of Nottinghamshire's children achieved a good level of development in 2013 which is above the national average of 52% but there is an increasing gap of 24% between those children in receipt of free school meals and their peers.

23. **Key Stage 2 milestone target for 2013:** reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non FSM pupils achieving the expected level in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 to **19%**

Due to a Department for Education change in the way performance is measured at Key Stage 2, previous data is now no longer directly comparable with 2013 data on the L4+ measure. This means that trend data cannot be provided although the Performance Review Team has calculated 2012 results against the new criteria so that some comparison can be made between 2012 and 2013. The new key indicator for attainment in 2013 is the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4+ in reading, writing *and* mathematics

combined whereas previously the measure was L4+ in English and mathematics combined.

**Impact:**

The **attainment** of Nottinghamshire's FSM pupils improved in comparison with 2012 with 59.2% of FSM students gaining L4+ in reading, writing and mathematics compared with 55.6% in 2012. The attainment of non FSM learners on this measure in 2013 remained broadly in line with their performance in 2012.

The gap in attainment between FSM and non FSM pupils achieving the expected level at Key Stage 2 narrowed by 4.6% and is broadly in line with the target set in the Closing the Gap Strategy. This is a significant achievement as this success can now be built upon by Nottinghamshire's secondary schools.

In terms of the proportion of pupils making **expected progress in reading** from Key Stage 1 to 2 in English (2 levels), the progress of FSM learners remained broadly similar from 2012 to 2013 whilst the performance of non FSM pupils declined slightly so that the gap actually narrowed by 1.1%.

The proportion of FSM pupils making **expected progress in writing** (2 levels) from Key Stage 1 to 2 has improved from 84.2% in 2012 to 87.2% in 2013. The proportion of non FSM pupils making expected progress has also improved but FSM learners have made a greater gain, so that the gap narrowed by 0.7% and now stands at 5.7% difference.

Similarly, the proportion of FSM pupils making **expected progress in mathematics** (2 levels) from Key Stage 1 to 2 improved from 81.7% in 2012 to 83.6% in 2013. The proportion of non FSM pupils making expected progress has also improved but FSM learners secured a greater gain therefore the gap narrowed by 0.7% and now stands at 6.8%.

This means that year on year, increasing numbers of Nottinghamshire's pupils eligible for FSM are entering Year 7 with the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to access the secondary curriculum and maximise their learning and improve their life chances.

24. **Key Stage 4 milestone target for 2013:** 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 **28%**

**Impact:**

The **attainment** of Nottinghamshire's FSM students improved again for the sixth year in succession with 35.2% of FSM students gaining 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics in 2013 compared with 32.5% in 2012, and 27.4% in 2011 at the beginning of this strategy.

The gap has narrowed between the performance of students eligible for FSM in Nottinghamshire and their peers across the country. This gap at Key Stage 4 continues to reduce year on year and now stands at 31.1%. Nonetheless, the gap continues to be significantly greater than the national gap in 2012.

In terms of the proportion of students making **expected progress from Key Stage 2 to 4 in English** (3 levels), non FSM students' progress has steadily improved year on year since 2010. The progress of FSM learners has also improved year on year but at a faster rate so that the gap has narrowed by over 8%. The progress of Nottinghamshire's FSM students in English is now broadly in line with the national average for this group.

Similarly, in terms of the proportion of students making **expected progress from Key Stage 2 to 4 in mathematics** (3 levels), non FSM students' progress has steadily improved year on year since 2010. The progress of FSM learners has also improved year on year but at a faster rate so that the gap has narrowed by over 8%. The progress of Nottinghamshire FSM students in mathematics is now just below the national average for this group.

### **Other Options Considered**

25. No other options were considered.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

26. Latest 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 interim 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**

27. 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.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That the Committee:

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

**John Slater**

**Service Director, Education Standards and Inclusion**



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**Constitutional Comments**

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

**Financial Comments (KLA 19/11/13)**

29. 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.

A Strategy for Closing the Educational Gaps in Nottinghamshire – six monthly review – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 10 June 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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