



**Kirklees**  
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Report of the

# **Overview & Scrutiny Panel for Education**

Review into

# **Raising Educational Attainment**

**July 2000**

**Kirklees Metropolitan Council**

## EDUCATION SCRUTINY PANEL - RAISING ATTAINMENT AT KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

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| <b>MEMBERS:</b>                 | Councillor Andrew Cooper ( <b>Chair</b> )<br>Councillor Mrs Marie Bower<br>Councillor Ian Harrison<br>Councillor Deryck Hillas |
| <b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>            | Mr Cliff Stewart<br>(Head of Personal and Strategic Services Resources Group)  |
| <b>COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATOR:</b> | Adrian Johnson<br>(Tel. 01484 221712)  |

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### 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel was set up to consider the topic of raising educational attainment. From the outset the Panel was mindful that, in view of the size of this topic, it would be necessary to focus on a particular aspect. The Panel therefore confined its investigation to raising attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2, and aimed to produce some recommendations which would include a key priority which would achieve some impact.

### 2. BACKGROUND AND EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

The Panel held one informal, and five formal, meetings, which included visits to two schools of similar size (in terms of number of pupils on roll), geographical and social environment. The following is an outline of the business considered at each meeting:-

**8 November 1999** - Informal meeting to identify the Panel's scrutiny role and working arrangements, together with a proposed work programme.

**30 November 1999** - Received background information to support the investigation namely:-

- (i) Draft annual report for the Education Service for 1998/99 containing information on the roles and responsibilities of individual Services, their achievements that year, relevant Performance Indicators, and their aims for 1999/2000.
- (ii) A review of aspects of the work of Kirklees LEA on school improvement - OSTED, May 1997 - this presented a very positive image of the LEA and its knowledge and working relationships with schools.
- (iii) Extract from a school dummy profile - providing statistical information for primary schools in 1998/99 in relation to attainment.

**22 December 1999** - Received an overview from the Head of School Effectiveness on the existing strategies for raising attainment and their effectiveness. Central to the principle of the concept of school improvement was an emphasis on effective working partnerships. Whilst it was within the individual school that improvements were achieved, staff and governors required well attuned support and accessible

comparative data to implement their strategies. Some of this support was provided by the LEA, who also worked closely with a range of agencies in carrying out these responsibilities.

The Panel was provided with information contained in the Education Development Plan (which LEAs were required to produce under the provisions of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998), which defined the priorities, strategies, objectives and activities necessary to raise standards and improve the performance of schools.

**1 February 2000** - The Panel undertook a visit to a school with a record of good practice in raising attainment. Evidence was taken on a range of issues, including:-

- The school's approach to self-evaluation.
- Support given by the LEA in terms of advice and guidance for governors and head teachers.
- Training available for Governors, head teachers and support staff.
- Provision of school comparative data.
- The role of target setting in raising standards within the school.
- The support provided by the School Contact Officers.

**29 February 2000** - Reviewed the findings from the school visit on 1 February 2000.

**28 March 2000** - Received a presentation from the Head of School Effectiveness on the strategies to address under achieving schools. The Panel then undertook a visit to an under achieving school and took evidence on the range of issues discussed in the first school visit.

### 3. **FINDINGS**

The main findings of the Panel are as follows:-

#### 3.1 **General Support from the LEA**

Evidence from the schools visited showed they were generally complimentary of the support given by the LEA, and used its services to a predominant extent as they were regarded to be of a good quality and value compared with external providers.

#### 3.2 **School Self-Evaluation - Support from the LEA**

There is a national course available, operated by the Council, on self-evaluation, together with a data analysis course. Additionally, schools receive statistical data (LEA School Profile) giving comparative information with other schools. However, schools find analysis of this data is time consuming and they have difficulty in making direct comparisons, as there are many issues that can make a difference to how the data is analysed/interpreted; for example children's different experiences and backgrounds. The School Contact Officers are available to help make sense of the data.

### **3.3 Advice and Guidance to Governors**

There is positive feedback from governors who have participated in the available training courses; some of these are held out of the district, so some governors experience difficulties in travelling. There is no one-to-one contact available for governors, but training information packs are provided; however these can be jargonistic and prove difficult to understand, particularly for new governors. There is a need for a basic plain English language document, outlining the responsibilities of governors and what their role entails, perhaps to include a glossary of terms to explain the various educational acronyms.

### **3.4 Broad and Balanced Curriculum**

Whilst acknowledging the importance of the numeracy and literacy strategies, these do have an impact on the time available for developing other areas of the curriculum.

### **3.5 Target Setting**

This was considered a key issue. Broad targets are set by the DfEE and, under current requirements, the LEA is obliged to agree targets with schools within a 2% margin of those set by the DfEE. There can be occasions when there is a mismatch between the perception of the LEA and schools as to what are considered to be realistic, achievable targets. The role of the School Contact Officer is considered vital in the target setting process, to ensure that the LEA has ownership of the targets (which the Panel feels is not currently the case), as well as the school. Also, there is anecdotal evidence that the stress felt by teachers can be passed on to pupils. There is limited incentive for teachers to reach attainment targets for which they have no ownership.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That the Panel commends the issues raised in the findings in 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, for consideration by the Education Service.
- (2) Specifically, the Panel feels attention is required on the following:-
  - (a) The setting of school targets must be undertaken in full consultation and agreement should be sought with schools, to ensure both the school and the LEA have full ownership; whilst accepting the need for challenging targets, schools must not be set up to fail through the setting of targets which are unrealistic and unachievable, with the consequential impact on the morale of staff and pupils.
  - (b) The role of School Contact Officers in the target setting process is vital; the School Contact Officer should have a facility role and should attend governing body meetings annually to explain the process of target setting and be involved with any subsequent review of targets at governing body level.
  - (c) Consideration should be given to changing the job title of the School Contact Officer, possibly to School Involvement Officer, to more appropriately emphasise the support nature of their role.

- (d) Consideration should be given to the role of the School Contact Officer being fundamentally examined during the Best Value Review of the School Effectiveness Service; that during the Best Value of the School Effectiveness Service the issues raised in this report are included as part of the challenge process and consideration be given as to how the performance of the Service should be measured.
- (3) The Panel supports and endorses the role of the School Contact Officers and would recommend their services to School Governing Bodies.
- (4) That the Scrutiny Forum Executive be requested to arrange for the report to be circulated to Kirklees schools for comment on the findings/ recommendations on targeting, and include, for information purposes, a synopsis/guide to Best Value.

SIGNED BY:

Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair of the Panel)

Councillor Mrs Marie Bower

Councillor Ian Harrison

Councillor Deryck Hillas

July 2000