

Kent Children's Future at Key Stage 2

“Together we care and achieve”



Executive Summary

The KS2 Select Committee report which examines the reasons for variations in KS2 performance with a focus on schools in areas of deprivation.

Executive Summary

This report

- examines levels of attainment at KS2 by providing a detailed quantitative overview of current performance across the County,
- describes the nationally agreed factors that contribute to differential achievement in deprived areas and how those factors are presumed to impact on a child's individual attainment
- and asks how some schools have seemingly broken this link between deprivation and poor attainment.

The report considers to what extent factors about Schools, Pupils, Parents, and Communities/localities have impacted on Key Stage 2 performance of primary schools that have high proportions of children from low income families. It considers what role KCC may have in the future to assist these schools, in the context of the current Government policy agenda. The factors considered include:

- the impact of **Deprivation**
- **performance** at KS2 in Kent and compared to other local authorities with similar proportions of pupils eligible for FSM
- **factors about Schools** including Quality of teaching, Quality of leadership, Aspirations and expectations for pupils, Assessment Systems, Quality of Pastoral care and the engagement of governors.
- **factors about Pupils** including Attendance, Behaviour, Aspirations, prior attainment
- **factors about Parents** including pupil mobility, engagement and relationships with parents, parents aspirations for children
- **factors about communities/localities** including concentrations of deprivation

Deprivation research

Analysis shows that overall pupils eligible for FSM are less likely to achieve Key Stage 2 threshold measures of level 4+ English and Maths and that there is a clear, measurable gap between the achievement levels of young people living in the most and least deprived areas of the county. In 2010 performance in Kent showed an achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving Level 4+ in English and Maths combined of 28%, compared nationally to a gap of 21%.¹ Analysis shows that eligibility for free school meals is strongly associated with poorer performance at every key stage. **By Key Stage 2, the odds of a non FSM pupil achieving level 4+ in English and Maths are 3.4 times higher than that of a FSM pupil.**

The link between deprivation and lower educational attainment is well proven in national and international research. This report demonstrates that the relationship between deprivation and low educational attainment is sustained and persistent, regardless of the age at which educational attainment is measured. Of greater significance, is that this is not automatic or inevitable. **Deprivation is clearly a disadvantage, but the evidence shows it is an answerable challenge, and not an excuse for low attainment.**

¹ Data for 2010 does not include schools who boycotted the KS2 tests

Schools that break the link

Understanding how this link between deprivation and attainment is seemingly broken by some schools is key to the findings of this report. Research suggests family characteristics and the home environment of children who experience deprivation have strong and persistent effect on life chances, and influences opportunities for learning. School strategies and approaches to these issues are important for deprived pupil outcomes, although effectiveness varies considerably between schools. The school attended makes a significant contribution to explaining differences between pupil attainment and progress, attitudes and behaviour (Mortimore et al 1988, cited DCSF 2009).

It is clear there is much that schools can do to minimise the impact of deprivation, and ensure pupils with deprived backgrounds are not permanently disadvantaged as their attainment and progress are supported. Some schools in Kent, despite higher than average levels of FSM and under considerable pressures from community disadvantage, have met or exceeded the threshold floor target for Pupils at KS2. How these schools have achieved this target is an important lesson in best practice.

The School Role

Schools are only part of the interventions that can challenge the impact of deprivation but do have considerable influence on children's lives. The emphasis is how to keep schools focused on learning, not overly distracted by high levels of deprivation, nor building programmes, or applying for academy status or frustration with other preventative service thresholds. Schools need to focus on what they are professionally good at, the things they can influence, not try to tackle the whole social situation. There are 3 basic ways in which schools work

1. What schools do within their own environment, functions within their gift – such as leadership and management
2. Things that school can influence – which are partially in their gift e.g. involvement of the parents and wider community
3. Factors outside their gift, housing, poverty, immigration, debt – they can respond to government policy but can only be distracted from their primary purpose by many of these bigger things

From the evidence, the successful schools controlled and changed what they do in school, then reached across to the community, which is a slower process. Schools were more successful where they supported their families and communities, and took a “whole child” approach to education. These schools have developed practical ways in working across school-home boundaries and addressing social and emotional development, physical and mental health and well-being; in the interests of better learning for the child.

Successful leadership dealt with the significant outside deprivation challenges affecting pupils and their schools by pragmatic management which enabled learning. Leaders removed barriers where they could, to minimise the impact of other barriers outside of their influence – focusing on pupils ‘readiness for learning’. Pupils’ outstanding progress was linked to the schools ability to address the profound and often multiple needs of its vulnerable pupils skilfully, instilling excellent attitudes to

teaching and learning, helping pupils to profit fully from good teaching and a well tailored curriculum.

The best Leaders and Managers improve standards through an unrelenting focus on quality of teaching and learning, assessment and tracking, and have good or outstanding schools despite challenging circumstances 'bucking the trend', and sometimes the expectation, of poor results. Conversely, where this is not the case, these factors are key reasons for under performance in some schools.

A broad, challenging, and motivating curriculum is vital in sustaining and promoting educational attainment. Pupils with a high level of engagement and enjoyment of a balanced, broad and quality curriculum ensure significant impact on pupil learning and outcomes. Using a creative, and rich, curriculum, vibrant, engaging teachers, 'should wake up thinking in children', and motivate them, engaging pupils in their own learning progress. If children look forward to coming to school, and enjoy the experience, they are in a better frame of mind to learn.

Good teaching is where we begin

Those schools where Leaders insist that good teaching is the minimum standard, and expect outstanding teaching and planning, can address the learning needs of different groups of pupils to achieve better outcomes. Leaders need a specific set of skills, including being able to analyse what goes on in the classroom and how to address the issues that arise. Where there are inadequacies in teaching style, or not enough good teachers, schools are assessed as only satisfactory. A 'satisfactory' level of teaching is not good enough for pupils to make good progress, and requires improvement. Improved consistency to good or better teaching is the key to successful outcomes for pupils.

The essential issue is less about individual teachers, all get good initial training; it is the culture of the school. Some teachers are strong, and would be good whatever the culture of the school. The evidence highlighted teachers who reportedly were previously satisfactory, but had flourished under excellent leadership, support to improve, and worked in a culture driving for improving standards. The strategic issue is whether the school is the kind of place where all teachers are helped to be at least good, something all schools should have a system to achieve. The school must monitor the teaching consistency regularly, feedback on improvement points, and give help and support where necessary. There should be peer review, evaluation and development points, within a set process so that teachers are not just judged on what is observed on a particular day. The school must look at the impact of teaching on pupil progress, and the pupils work. In the final analysis, teaching is only good if you can see it reflected in the work of the pupils, their progress, and what these confirm of their experiences.

The children in challenging schools that had bucked the trend knew they were being helped to learn, were motivated and eager to continue with their learning. The successful schools had a whole set of processes to raise the level of teaching, through a team culture and joint commitment to improve and deliver 'the best'. Teachers need to up-skill first, through effective monitoring and support to improve, and be accountable and challenged on pupils progress. Leadership needs to know how to improve the quality of teaching and accelerate the rate of learning.

Using evidence from assessment to adapt teaching to meet needs of learners is a significant factor, and fundamental in addressing underachievement. Robust assessment and tracking systems contributed significantly to improving standards, through regular monitoring, identifying where teaching and learning could be enhanced to accelerate progress. The systems for tracking pupil progress and teachers' understanding of how well pupils are doing has proved effective in raising expectations, identifying pupils at risk of falling behind, thus needing extra help, and showing where pupils need extra challenge. This has had a big impact on pupil progress by enabling teachers to respond by identifying where teaching can be strengthened, adapting their planning, setting appropriate challenge, and targeting resources quickly to ensure pupils make good progress.

Pupils driving progress

From the evidence, it is clear pupils made better progress when it was identified what they needed to do to improve to reach the next level – allowing the learner to drive their learning. The schools that did well knew how to accelerate learning for pupils who needed to make more progress and did not accept a pupil's background determines poor attainment.

Pupils need challenge, and to challenge themselves. To be able to do this a learner needs to be able to explain what they have learned. Children may not naturally relate learning so they need to acquire this habit, and this is something that teaching can do to make the learning explicit. Teachers must help to make the understanding clear for the learner, and also have the learner say what they find difficult, and how they apply the learning. When you put the learner in charge you have a position where they can say what they need to do or what they want to try or do next. Good consistent marking that is timely and regular, feedback, and individual targets, with understanding of where they are and what they need to do next to improve, are significant drivers for improved outcomes – as the children become the drivers. The whole process should make what learning is about clearer, and when this is done well it challenges the learner to learn at a higher level.

Headteachers and Governors

Finding high calibre Headteachers is a national issue, 25% of Kent Headteachers will retire in the next few years and it can be difficult to recruit Headteachers especially for schools in less advantaged areas. This is a key strategic issue. There is a need to grow our own Headteachers - it is not about a potential Headteacher having years of experience but having the right experience and skill set, and in the short term spreading the use of the best Headteachers via more collaboration between heads, thus spreading good practice across more schools.

A further variation is the engagement of governors in primary schools and their skills. The role of governors is critical and their engagement is impacting on Key Stage 2 performance. The evidence suggests school governance is an influential factor on attainment and that it needs to work closely with the school and also be able to hold them to account. Governors were most effective when they are 'fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and contribute to shaping its strategic direction'. (Ofsted April 11).

One of the reasons that the Government has given for schools moving to Academies is that there is evidence that Academy Governors are more challenging, but there is no reason why all school Governors should not challenge. There is a need to raise expectations, and understand the succession planning for a new generation of headteachers, and a new generation of governors to challenge the headteachers.

The learning continuum

The impact of low levels at entry in the early years was a factor. What is evident is that overall improvements in the Foundation Stage have been achieved and it is expected that this improvement will continue to be evidenced within both KS 1 results (which are demonstrating year on year improvements) through to KS 2. Fundamental to this is for schools to value and build on previous learning, therefore transition is important as well as a shared understanding that quality teaching first is fundamental for quality learning to follow. However it was clearly identified that there is a need to think of the 'destination continuum' – that there is a need to lift attainment at KS2, making sure it is part of a continuous improvement for young people and not a situation to be viewed in isolation.

A further factor to consider is that where interventions are delivered, how are they assessed and evaluated? Fundamentally do they close the gap long term or do they merely bring a child up to expected levels now, and then following the withdrawal of the intervention, the child "drops back" to below the expected level. There is more to do and there is a need to link Children centres, nurseries and primary schools to consider the pupils learning journey as a whole, sharing practice and training. The evidence identified a need to not only continue to improve levels at intake but that relationships with pre-schools, children centres and schools need strengthening and aligning, including a continuity of preventative services as children move into new schools.

Out of school

Extra curricula learning can have benefits for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, giving valuable experiences, enhancing the curriculum and enabling pupils to have cultural and sporting opportunities that extend beyond the communities where they live. Good education outside of classroom can lead to improved outcomes, including helping pupils to engage in learning, improving achievement, standards, motivation and personal development. It was noted that the success of enrichment and extended service activities is dependent on schools being able to target families and pupils most in need. The ethos and principles which underpin these activities in the county struck a chord and seem of particular relevance to the whole report:

The 5As

1. If you can raise a child's **Aspirations**;
2. It will improve their **Attitude** to learning;
3. Which will enhance their **Attendance**;
4. Thus improving their **Attainment** and
5. Life-long **Achievement**

Beginning at the borders

In Kent 60% of schools are deemed to be good or outstanding, with 3.6% in a category (notice to improve or special measures) and the remaining 36% satisfactory. There is, however, a significant proportion of primary schools in a borderline satisfactory category. These are schools where overall effectiveness is judged only to be satisfactory and achievement, teaching, leadership and management are also only satisfactory. The position in Kent is clear – In Ofsted terms “satisfactory” means “adequate” which is not something to be satisfied about. Children need to make good progress, and schools should have plans to move on from satisfactory to good and should understand what they need to do to achieve this. When Ofsted award “satisfactory” they make recommendations on how to make the school better than it is.

‘Satisfactory’ schools has direct relevance to ‘The social aspiration gap’, as ‘Satisfactory’ schools have a widespread impact on outcomes for disadvantaged children (and other children) as well as failing schools (Francis 2011). Given the importance of schooling for the life chances of disadvantaged pupils and concentrations of such pupils in ‘(un)satisfactory’ schools, a step change in the performance of these schools could make an important contribution to closing this aspect of the gap and improving overall performance. It is suggested that ‘longer term’ satisfactory schools have a lower capacity to improve and that these schools need better support and accountability to enable improvement. There is a key challenge for these schools in spreading the good practice which they do contain across the whole school. Lying behind the call both for greater support and guidance for these schools, is that the status of ‘satisfactory’ is only acceptable if it is explicitly seen as a foundation for improvement.

Aspirations and Involvement

Research identifies low aspirations in parents, and for their children, from deprived backgrounds has a negative influence on children’s outcomes, ability to engage, and learn from what is provided in the classroom.

Where child and parental aspirations are low, parents are often difficult to engage, insular, sometimes transient, or even 3rd or 4th generation unemployed, with no understanding of other lifestyles. Such characteristics often result in minimal support for education and learning. Where schools recognise these limitations on pupils, they commit not only to the children, but also to supporting the parents. There is a need to raise the aspirations of the children, and to do that effectively means influencing parents as well. This is often achieved through a more creative curriculum, which involves parents in the school, and their own understanding of learning, fostering positive attitudes.

The pupil voice provided valuable insight into the importance of happiness in pupils to enable them to be willing and able to engage in learning; increase in confidence; and succeed in reaching their potential. Overall, the results show children are most concerned that lack of money, poor secondary education, exam failure, poor health and/or family issues will prevent them from achieving in the future. Pupils love of learning, enjoyment and engagement with school came across strongly. The importance of a supportive environment, and an enjoyable, educational learning experience was clear.

Pupil role models seemed largely influenced and inspired by celebrity culture. There were fewer celebrity role models for the schools that had higher attainment, and for one such group, although 50% of the class named a celebrity as their role model, each choice related in some way to future career intentions. For example, children who named authors planned to be authors in the future.

The insights highlighted the importance of celebrity culture to children, and issues concerning their future including low self-worth, fear of injury, parental concerns and peer pressure.

Overall parents were very positive and had good relationships with school, commenting that their child was 'thriving', that they have 'lots of experiences and opportunities', 'are making progress', that their children 'love coming to school and enjoy their day'. Significantly, parents regarded the FLO PSA as being of particular help. This supported other research that in improving outcomes for pupils, enjoyment at school, good information about pupil progress, and how parents can help support this at home, is as important as good teaching, supporting children to reach their potential, approachability, and excellent pastoral care.

It was significant that not all parents included comments about how their children may achieve their goals, but those that did highlighted the need for their children to work hard and their role in providing support. Getting parents involved with their child's learning, getting them to read with their child and getting them to come into the school and take a real interest in what their child was doing, really improved the outcomes for those children.

Drugs and falling in with the 'wrong crowd' were highlighted by parents as the main barriers to their children achieving in the future.

The Kent Challenge

Although there is much to celebrate in Kent schools with evidence of outstanding leadership and classroom practice, innovation and dynamism, some schools are facing specific challenges and performance in some schools does not meet the high standards expected. Kent has introduced a new school improvement model and 'The Kent Challenge', looks to improve outcomes in failing schools but also to raise levels of practice in satisfactory schools. The Kent Challenge and Leadership Strategy will hopefully provide a more strategic approach, with more effective cross school participation and management. The Kent Challenge has clear expectations of school performance and pupil attainment and clear accountability. The plan is to address underachievement in schools and build on Kent's new model to help deliver **a county wide school improvement strategy, embracing all schools**, by shining a spotlight on the reasons for low performance of schools and the underachievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities.

Structural solutions have provided answers for some schools. There are a number of structural solutions:-

- 1) Loose collaboration – where schools can learn from each other.
- 2) Soft Federation – pool resources and share teachers
- 3) Hard Federation – Headship across a number of schools, shared resources and teaching, joint learning

4) Academy - can offer the same as 3) above

It is about sustainable improvement through a high calibre of leadership and management. The evidence gathered showed 2 Federations where the securing of effective Leadership had made significant improvement to outcomes or was making good steps to tackle standards of teaching, assessment and individual targets. Federations also provided advantages through opportunities to share resources and pool staff, and use budgets to bring in joint support when needed.

Challenges to services

The main reasons for underperformance and contributing factors are:

- insufficient high quality leadership
- too much teaching that is only satisfactory
- weak tracking and assessment systems
- difficulties recruiting and retaining staff
- governance not sufficiently challenging
- low expectations, low aspirations and poor attitudes to learning, low motivation
- contributing/complicating factors: high mobility, late arrivals in year 6, school managing significantly high levels of social service involvement which impact on child and learning, reduction in support from other services, low levels at entry to school. Although exceptionally challenging circumstances they are not an excuse for low attainment. However some schools are dealing with a large number of problems and a large number of pupils with these problems, i.e.. EAL, mobility, in year and late arrivals, and although they are doing well under the circumstances could be doing even better with a smaller number of these pupils.

Every day that children spend in classrooms where they are not learning properly is another day that they are held back from achieving their full potential. The Education, Learning and Skills Directorate are making considerable effort to raise levels of attainment, especially through the Kent Challenge programme, however there are still issues across the county, including:

- To significantly reduce the number of schools in category, or in Kent Challenge.
- To increase the number of headteachers with the ability to drive up standards and plan for an impending large number of retirees.
- To press Teachers more to acquire skills to raise attainment.
- To ensure the LA can provide enough ongoing challenge and support.
- To ensure Governors understand the required skills for new headteachers.
- To enable and ensure governors provide the right challenge to their headteachers. Levels of understanding of data and what it is telling governors about their schools is impacting on the ability of governors to challenge and set improvement priorities. Finding suitable governors with the right skills and time is a significant issue.

- To advise on and influence the targeting of Pupil Premium monies. Is the Pupil Premium designed to provide a resource to tackle the barriers to learning for children facing the biggest hurdles being used to shore up general school finances?
- To ensure directly provided LA support can meet demand and balancing this with budget pressures. Are we reducing directly provided LA support (Ed Psychs, specialist teachers, extended services coordinators) at the time they are most needed?
- To sustain the great improvement in EYFS results.
- To work with Specialist Children's Services to ensure that their work is focussed on raising attainment. With Children's Social Services concentrating on the most difficult and complex cases, will schools be able to cope with the problems many children present? Can preventative services keep pace with this demand?

Our challenge to Education, Learning and Skills Directorate (ELS)

There is only one recommendation from this report. In the spirit of challenge to schools, and their need to challenge their teachers and pupils, the Select Committee challenge ELS to take this information, and begin a process of sharing with stakeholders the purpose, relevance, and importance of this data and evidence, driving improvement in Kent Schools and ensuring the best quality leadership and teaching performance be targeted on our most disadvantaged schools and their communities.

The data and evidence point directly to 7 key points:

- **Change is possible with ELS(KCC), Governors, Schools and partners challenging and working together.**
- **Can transform schools in challenging circumstances.**
- **Can close the gap in attainment for pupils from more deprived backgrounds. Can ensure performance of deprived pupils improves significantly so that gaps in attainment close.**
- **Can transform schools and challenge them to be outstanding not satisfactory. Can ensure there are more significantly good or outstanding schools in Kent, and in more deprived areas.**
- **Can transform outcomes at Key Stage 2.**
- **Can be more transparent about outcomes at Key Stage 2.**
- **Can ensure future attainment is above National average at Key Stage 2 in Kent.**

The Key Findings of the report are set out at:

Quantitative Overview: Context and Impact of Deprivation page 36

Mosaic Analysis page 52

The School Effect page 62

- Important school based factors for success
- Factors contributing to success - agencies/outside partners
- Factors contributing to low performance

Parent Insights on schools and aspirations page 128

Pupil Insights on schools and aspirations page 134

The key findings summarise the main points arising. These are not exhaustive and do not give the full illustrations as in the body of the text.