

The council role in school improvement:

Case studies of emerging models



Local Government Association

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We work with councils to support, promote and improve local government.

We are a politically-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.

We are a membership organisation. In total, 423 local authorities are members of the LGA for 2012/13. These include English local councils, Welsh councils via the Welsh LGA, and fire, national park, passenger transport and police authorities, plus one town council.

SOLACE

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in the public sector in the UK. We are committed to promoting public sector excellence. We provide our members with opportunities for personal and professional development, and seek to influence debate around the future of public services to ensure that policy and legislation are informed by the experience and expertise of our members. Whilst the vast majority of SOLACE members work in local government we also have members in senior positions in health authorities, police and fire authorities and central government.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword by Councillor David Simmonds, Chairman, LGA Children and Young People Board | 4 |
| Introduction by Mark Rogers, Chair, SOLACE Education and Children Network | 6 |
| Creating a strong shared vision with schools | 8 |
| Dorset County Council | 8 |
| East Sussex County Council | 9 |
| Lambeth Council | 10 |
| Leicester City Council | 12 |
| Restructuring school improvement services | 14 |
| Devon County Council | 14 |
| Hertfordshire County Council | 15 |
| Kingston upon Thames Borough Council | 16 |
| Solihull Council | 17 |
| Wigan Council | 18 |
| Maintaining a strong and wide-ranging school improvement offer for schools | 20 |
| Durham County Council | 20 |
| Ealing Council | 21 |
| Liverpool City Council | 22 |
| Gloucestershire County Council | 23 |
| Strengthening partnerships with schools | 25 |
| Camden Council | 25 |
| Suffolk County Council | 26 |
| Bexley Council | 28 |
| Integrating school partnerships with wider council partnerships | 29 |
| Brighton & Hove City Council | 29 |
| Sunderland City Council | 30 |
| Other resources | 31 |

Foreword



It gives me great pleasure to introduce this report, which showcases the work being done by councils up and down the country to improve the educational achievement of local children and young people. Clearly, it is schools that have the most important role in making sure that children achieve their full educational potential. But councils have a vital role in supporting and challenging local schools and colleges to improve; and in tackling underperformance.

The context in which councils support school improvement is changing. Schools are being given increasing autonomy and are expected to take more responsibility for their own improvement. The number of academies has significantly increased since the General Election, with nearly 3,000 academies now open. Councils have no powers or funding to tackle underperformance in academies, so have had to develop new ways of working with academies and local schools.

These case studies show how local authorities are adapting to this changing context by strengthening and deepening their relationships with schools. Councils are providing support and challenge to school improvement partnerships and working with schools to provide targeted intervention for schools identified as being at risk.

A wide variety of models are developing. These range from the setting up of 'stand-alone' improvement services jointly owned with schools; to councils that continue to provide a comprehensive range of traded services by making sure that they more closely meet the needs of local schools.

A common thread is the development of a more 'grown up' relationship between councils and schools, which recognises that they have important complementary roles. Another common feature is a shared intolerance of failure which means that councils and schools are working together to identify underperforming schools and to move quickly to turn them around to make sure that no child is denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

I would like to thank the councils that agreed to feature as a case study in this report. We have consciously chosen both councils that have well developed models already in operation and others that are in the process of recasting their relationships with local schools. We have loosely grouped them under high-level headings, such as 'creating a strong shared vision with schools' and 'restructuring school improvement services' but in most cases councils exemplify similar approaches and could equally well have been included under another heading.

This report is timely, coinciding as it does with the introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement on 1 June

2013. I hope it will provide food for thought for all councils as they consider their school improvement offer in the light of the new framework. I believe it shows councils in a very positive light and that the local government sector can feel confident that it is able to respond to the challenges of helping more autonomous schools to improve to the benefit of all our children and young people.



Councillor David Simmonds
Chairman, LGA Children and Young People Board

Introduction



Who should occupy the so-called “intermediate tier” - and how - is a hot topic!

Historically, councils have been able to presume a near monopoly of this space. Yes, there’s been some encroachment over the years - Grant Maintained status, HMI surveys, Ofsted inspections, National Strategies and the legion of largely unloved Field Forces have all had their impact - but, until the advent of the Coalition Government, local (education) authorities could pretty much rest on their laurels, safe in the knowledge that policy, legislation and resources were all on their side as the principal external agents of locally-based, day-to-day school improvement support and challenge.

But since 2010 this security and certainty have been knocked for six by the reforming zeal of a Secretary of State who, discontented with the unevenness of pupil outcomes and school performance, openly poses the question “is local government part of the problem rather than the solution?”. Too much variation in commitment to, and effectiveness in discharging school improvement responsibilities has, in good part, prompted this view and councils have been forced to sit up and pay attention.

Add to this other key drivers such as: the industrialisation of Academisation (you know that a change is significant when a noun becomes, first, a proper noun and then a verb); the associated resource switching; and the clarion call of “only good is good enough and excellence the goal for all”. Put these together and it becomes clear just how important it is that councils confront the reality that there are new, and more fashionable, kids on the block – Academy chains, school collaboratives, etc.

So this document is important for a number of reasons. Crucially, it shows that councils can - and are - adapting to the changing policy environment. It demonstrates that they still have the appetite to work with educators and institutions across the spectrum because achievement for all children and young people requires them to be “governance blind”. And it sets out, self-evidentially, one of the key strengths of local government, namely that it is highly adaptable and resourceful, demonstrating the truism that policy implementation has to be determined at the local level if it is to be meaningful, deliverable and owned.

The diversity of approaches on show absolutely validates the argument for an ongoing role for councils in the intermediate tier. It also demonstrates something that the critics of local government too easily (and lazily) level at the sector - that because we dare to challenge and, sometimes, question the evidence base and potential efficacy of national policy (as we have always done in a quite legitimate effort to “stress test” what we know we will have to

make work on the ground) we are somehow uncommitted to the pursuit of excellence. Well, what you will find in the following pages is a range of local responses all of which illustrate three key features: local government's continued commitment to educational excellence; its thirst for continuous improvement; and its creativity when it comes to re-inventing support and challenge for a new age.

Local government may not yet have worked through all the issues, nor developed all of the new approaches and relationships it needs to - but councils do accept and, increasingly, are embracing plurality. Councils are also struggling to resource sustainable new approaches and forgive them if, occasionally, they still ask whether or not it is a futile pursuit to be seeking to stay in the school improvement game. But when you read these case studies you will discover two things: firstly, what your own place is actually doing; and, secondly, you will be reassured to learn that the local government family does still see itself as the champion of excellence.

We are filling the gap!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SA Mark Rogers". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

Mark Rogers

Chair of the SOLACE Education and Children Network

Creating a strong shared vision with schools

Dorset – a strong shared moral purpose with schools

Eighty nine per cent of primary school children in Dorset now attend a school that is rated by Ofsted as ‘good’ or better. Of the 175 schools in the county, 15 are converter academies and one is in the process of becoming a sponsored academy.

The county council works closely with local schools to monitor performance and support school-to-school improvement. The relationship is based on a strong shared moral purpose which focuses on maximising the educational outcomes for all Dorset children and young people and is intolerant of failure. The council works proactively with schools to improve staff performance and supports them in dealing with underperformance.

At the heart of the school improvement offer is programme of regular school visits by self-evaluation partners (SEP), the vast majority of whom are serving or recently retired Heads. The SEP programme is funded from a top slice of the Dedicated Schools Grant, agreed with local schools – including academies, which is held by the county council. When a serving Head is involved, schools are reimbursed for the time their Head has spent in training or visiting other schools.

Each school gets three main visits a year to discuss performance and improvement and the SEP reports are a standing item at school governing body meetings. School governors are given an unequivocal message that it is their duty to hold the school to account to

produce the best possible outcomes for Dorset children.

Governors’ services are provided on a fully traded basis and the vast majority of schools buy into the service. An innovative feature is training and support for governors in working with their school leadership team to produce an annually updated self-evaluation framework for their school. The ‘Dorset SEF’ is seen as a key tool in making sure that schools are fully prepared for future Ofsted inspections.

In addition to the general offer to all schools, a priority group of schools that are showing signs of weak performance are given targeted support. This includes regular case conferences involving key stakeholders for each school to identify areas for improvement. This is backed up with an enhanced review and support package focused on the priorities identified. Largely as a result of this work, eleven schools previously graded ‘satisfactory’ by Ofsted have moved to ‘good’ at their most recent inspection this school year.

Councillor Toni Coombs, Dorset’s Lead Member for Children’s services said:

“Dorset has a good working relationship with its schools, both supportive and challenging. By working together we have and continue to improve the outcomes for children in the county. This has been borne out by recent inspections under the tougher new Ofsted framework.”

For further information please contact:
Mark Loveys, Acting Head of Learning and School Improvement:
mark.loveys@dorsetcc.gov.uk

East Sussex – fostering a ‘can do’ attitude to its relationship with schools

Schools in East Sussex do well – 70 per cent of the county’s primary school children and 78 per cent of secondary school children attend schools rated ‘good’ or better by Ofsted. But the council is ambitious to work with local schools to do better and make sure that all children and young people in the county are able to attend an establishment at least rated good by Ofsted and all make appropriate levels of progress.

Although schools as a whole are showing improving results, progress is slower than in statistically similar areas and some schools are falling behind. Another cause for concern is that when the county’s Standards Learning and Effectiveness Service intervene in schools, it supports significant improvement but this is not always sustained in the long term.

In June 2012 the council launched a consultation with schools and key stakeholders in the education system: ‘A proposition for partnership’. In response to the consultation, the political leadership of the county council agreed to set up a ‘can do’ group involving the key Cabinet members and officers with responsibility for education and external advisers to identify the key areas for development in response to the consultation. The priority areas for action identified include:

- Developing a **strong shared moral purpose** so that councillors, officers, head teachers, governors and teachers share a commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for all children and young people in East Sussex
- **Improving school leadership in the county** by encouraging and incentivising schools to federate and cluster; working with new and existing academy sponsors to bring in outside expertise; and ‘growing its own’ leadership capacity by investing in training, support and recognition for promising future school leaders
- **Developing the school improvement offer in the county** by recognising that school-to-school improvement is the best way to secure sustainable long term improvement in performance, with the County Council continuing to play a key role in enabling and brokering school-to-school support
- **Supporting councillors** to adapt to a new role as the council moves from being a commissioner and provider of schools to become a champion of children and parents and of educational excellence. This will include a programme of training for councillors.

Members of the group are acutely aware that real transformational change in the council’s relationship with schools will only come about by working in collaboration with them. So the next stage will be to involve schools in the development of an implementation plan for the priority areas for action.

For further information contact Fiona Wright, Assistant Director – Schools, Youth and Inclusion Support:
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Lambeth – a vision for ‘strong schools at the heart of strong communities’

Lambeth has 87 schools, eight of them academies. It is an area of great diversity and social deprivation, with very high population flux. It is the 19th most deprived council area nationally and the fourth most deprived in London. However, 86 per cent of its schools are judged good and outstanding, with 28 per cent judged outstanding. Only one school is in an Ofsted category of concern, but is improving rapidly in a federation brokered by the council.

School improvement is a high political priority for Lambeth councillors and results at GCSE in the borough have improved for 15 years consecutively. At primary and secondary level results are above national averages with progress of pupils between key stages 1 and 2 at the top of the national league table.

The vision is for ‘strong schools at the heart of strong communities’. Education is seen as a key ‘universal’ service and the council believes that strong schools facilitate excellent outcomes for all, effective early intervention, community cohesion and a strong local economy. It believes that at a time of economic challenge it is even more crucial that children and young people in Lambeth are given every opportunity for an excellent education.

In the context of reduced funding the council has worked hard to develop a new infrastructure of school improvement support focussed on encouraging mutual support in clusters of schools, federations and a Teaching Schools Alliance. This is backed up by a strong core school improvement offer.

Support for school-to-school improvement is a key underpinning factor.

The council is a strategic partner, together with the Institute of Education, in the Lambeth Teaching Schools Alliance. The Alliance is led by an outstanding Lambeth school. It has 58 schools in its membership, including schools outside the borough. It is envisaged that the Alliance will take an increasing role in managing school to school support in the future, including work to support continuous professional development, newly qualified teachers and initial teacher education.

The council has supported the development of strong federations and partnerships and all schools, including academies, are members of the local school clusters. The council supports school leaders to become system leaders as executive head teachers and cluster leads.

The council knows its schools well and has very strong relationships with them. It takes its statutory role of monitoring, challenging and supporting its schools very seriously and intervenes when necessary to ensure improvement. All schools, including academies, have an attached school improvement adviser and most academies buy into the council’s adviser services on a traded basis. A schools data and research team offers high quality data analysis and best practice research. The school improvement offer is funded by trading and through contributions from DSG and core council funding.

Debbie Jones, Director of Children and Young People’s Service in Lambeth and recent past president of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services notes:

“I am very pleased that Ofsted has recently recognised the core role that councils have in challenging and supporting all their education provision to provide excellent outcomes for children and young people and is introducing an inspection framework to assure the strength of that. We believe that it is essential that there is local accountability for local provision however governed”.

For further information contact: Cathy Twist, Assistant Director, Schools and Educational Improvement:
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LEICESTER RAISING ACHIEVEMENT – STRATEGIC



The Vision
(City Mayor’s Delivery Plan and Children & Young People’s Plan)

We want the quality of educational provision to be amongst the best in the country so that every child and young person is to improve children’s lives – working in partnership to raise aspirations and

Our commitment is to work together to improve life chances of the most vulnerable children; support all children to achieve their potential; keep children safe from family poverty

Statement of Purpose

Good educational achievement is fundamental to improving the quality of life for all of our residents. The City Mayor is committed to ensuring high quality provision and good outcomes. We are democratically accountable to residents and

We will act

- As champions for children and parents
- To shape effective commissioning
- As a broker of partnerships

As a Champion for Children and Parents we:

- Articulate a vision for education in the city
- Challenge underperformance
- Ensure democratic accountability to stakeholders
- Secure services for children and families which remove barriers to well-being and achievement

In Shaping Effective Commissioning we:

- Hold a strategic overview of city needs in education
- Provide data on key educational outcomes city-wide and by locality
- Support and intervene as appropriate to ensure high quality education in the city
- Support Governors to lead school improvement

To realise the vision and fulfil our role, the Key Strategic Priorities for Leicester City over the next 5 years are:

- Plan sufficient and appropriate high-quality educational places
- Secure good leadership and governance in all schools
- Ensure every school/setting is good or outstanding
- Close the gap for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- Improve outcomes and progress in mathematics
- Sustain improvements in literacy

Key Delivery Plans

To achieve the Key Strategic Priorities other supporting priorities, projects, plans and activities are in place under the overall strategy

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Pupil Place Planning</p> <p>Key Plans, Policies, Activities</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Places - SEN strategy - Building Schools for the Future (BSF) <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">1</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Leadership & Governance</p> <p>Key Plans, Policies, Activities</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governor Conference - Licensed Governor training Programme - Succession Planning - Deputy HT programme - Success through Collaboration programme - EIP, CPH & Development Groups <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">2</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Good & Outstanding Schools</p> <p>Key Plans, Policies, Activities</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School to School Support - Success through Collaboration - Building Schools for the future (BSF) Strategy - CPD for Quality first Teaching <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">3</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Closing the Gap</p> <p>Key Plans, Policies, Activities</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEN Strategy - Virtual Schools - Closing the Gap - EAL |
|---|--|---|--|

RAISING ASPIRATION IN ALL

OVERVIEW (MAY 2013)

Every child has the chance to fulfil his or her potential. Our vision is to build achievement for all children and young people, to ensure that every child is safe and make a significant contribution to mitigating the effects and causes of poverty.

The City and Council have a strong interest and an important role in ensuring the quality of this key universal service.

- As a Broker of Partnerships we:**
- Are a lead partner in developing strategies and local solutions to raise aspiration and achievement
 - Invest in strong partnership to shape the quality of educational provision and improve standards
 - Support the growth of outstanding practice and innovative solutions

The following 3 years (2013-2016) are to:

Researching Delivery Plans identified below:

Closing the Gap
Key Plans, Policies, Activities

Local Action Plan
Gap projects

4

Mathematics & Literacy
Key Plans, Policies, Activities

Includes:

- Every Child Counts
- Every Child a Reader
- Whatever it Takes

5+6

L W E D O

Leicester City's Strategic Overview diagram illustrates the links that run from the City Mayor's vision, to the Children and Young People's plan through to the key strategic priorities and the workstreams to achieve it. The strategic priorities are driven by the data the council holds about children and young people and its knowledge of schools and settings. One of the main aims of this piece of work is to communicate and engage with head teachers, governors and key stakeholders to support a shared vision and understanding of priorities and continue to work collaboratively to make the vision and aspiration of the city a reality.

It is a working document and will continue to be developed by engaging with key stakeholders.

For further information contact: Jasbir Mann, Head of Service, Learning, Quality and Improvement (0-11): jasbir.mann@leicester.gov.uk

Restructuring school improvement services

Devon – a joint school improvement venture with Babcock

In April 2012 Devon County Council set up a joint venture with Babcock International Group plc to provide school improvement and inclusion services to meet both its own core responsibilities and provide a broad traded offer for its 310 maintained schools and 52 academies. The council has a 19 per cent interest in the joint venture and Babcock 81 per cent.

The aim of the partnership was to secure a wide-ranging school improvement offer for Devon schools on a sustainable long-term basis. Three hundred council staff were transferred to the new organisation and it is trading well and looking to provide support to schools across the county borders.

The council's aim is that 100 per cent of schools should be 'good' or better and to ensure the best possible outcomes for all Devon children and young people. The role of the council is also to protect the interests of the most vulnerable pupils and its commissioning of the work of the joint venture reflects these priorities. The vision was set out in the county's 'championing children' strategy, published in January 2013: www.devon.gov.uk/championing-children.pdf

The officers at the core use their detailed knowledge of specialist areas and the performance of local schools and groups of learners to inform commissioning decisions.

They have a high visibility with schools and draw on both the expertise and services provided by Babcock to support schools identified as underperforming.

The lead officers in the council have a central budget to commission a wide range of services from the joint venture, including support for the most vulnerable groups, such as traveller children, pupils with English as an additional language and children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The commissioning process is based on a cycle of measurable outcomes and other impact measures rather than a prescriptive list of activities. This approach brings stronger accountabilities through the commissioning process and more flexibility for the provider.

Sue Clarke, Head of Education and Learning at Devon County Council says:

“The joint venture partnership will sustain a rich service offer and outcomes-based commissioning means that as a local authority we have to be very clear about our financial priorities and the outcomes we want for our learners.”

For further details please contact Sue Clarke, Head of Education and Learning: sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk

Hertfordshire – the ‘Herts for Learning’ company gives schools a majority share in the school improvement service

Hertfordshire has 528 schools and 453 of them are still maintained. Seventy-one are academies and there are 3 free schools and one studio school. Standards are high: 74 per cent of schools are rated good or better by Ofsted and 27 per cent are judged to be outstanding.

In 2009/10 the County had a large school improvement service with about 300 staff, offering a very wide range of services. As part of the council’s transformation programme, resources available for school improvement reduced from £84 per pupil to £27 per pupil in 2011/12. From 1 September 2013, ‘Herts for Learning’ (HfL) will be established as a ‘schools company’ in which all schools have been offered a share. The overwhelming majority (470 schools) took up a share at a cost of £25 and the company is owned 80:20 by schools and the county council.

HfL has been created after two years of close working with head teachers and governors in the county. The council will commission core statutory services from the company and will be its single biggest customer. The company will also trade with Hertfordshire schools. The council’s core team retains knowledge and understanding of local schools in order to inform commissioning and to allow it to perform its ‘challenge’ function.

The key benefits from the point of view of the council are:

- It gives schools a majority share in the school improvement service – a political priority for councillors
- The company supports and formalises the concept of a Hertfordshire ‘family of schools’. It cements a new vision and relationship with schools
- It gives the council greater flexibility in the current financial context.

The underlying rationale for the new partnership is that schools don’t want to lose the high quality of services that they had been used to in the past and the council has a very close interest in making sure that its local schools are good.

“Herts for Learning is an exciting and innovative approach to school improvement which builds on the excellent relationship between the local authority and Hertfordshire schools and places accountability and ownership of services with the schools themselves.”

Robert Gordon – Leader of Hertfordshire County Council

For more information please contact Gillian Cawley, Assistant Director, Commissioner for Education Services:
gillian.cawley@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Or visit the website: www.hertsforlearning.co.uk

See also the recent NFER case study on Hertfordshire: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/MTSL02/MSTL02Hertfordshirecasestudy.pdf>

Royal Borough of Kingston – ‘EducationKingston’ underpins its partnership with schools

Kingston is a small London authority with 49 schools. Nine of its 10 secondary schools are academies and there are two primary academies. The borough’s schools score highly on measures of attainment and pupil progress and 84 per cent of both primaries and secondaries are rated ‘good’ or better by Ofsted.

Strong partnership working between the council and schools has been built up over more than 15 years and is the principle that underpins its school improvement work with schools. The council has a clear role in challenging and supporting schools to improve and Kingston schools welcome this challenge.

In April 2012 ‘EducationKingston’ was designed and established jointly with schools to underpin the partnership. Its Partnership Board comprises nine head teachers elected by their peers, plus the Director of Learning and Children’s Services and the Lead School Improvement Partner. The aim was to establish a successor to the council’s highly regarded inspection and advisory service that was being threatened as a result of budget cuts and the council’s reducing statutory role as schools were given increased autonomy.

All the borough’s schools, except the two grammar schools, are members of ‘EducationKingston’ and pay a subscription fee of £7,000 each per annum. The council has committed support ‘in kind’ to the tune of £750,000 per annum over five years, the same period to which the schools have committed.

All member schools are assigned a School Improvement Partner (SIP) who provides support and robust external challenge. SIPs are expected to establish excellent working relationships with schools and exercise their functions as equal professionals in the school improvement process. For their subscription schools also gain free attendance at EducationKingston networks, forums and events and have access to a range of support services and receive an allocation of credits to ‘spend’ on bespoke and additional support from EducationKingston staff. This allows them the means to customise and tailor the support that they receive.

Head teacher Chris Hodges, Chair of the EducationKingston Partnership Board, said:

“EK is proving to be a great success. In its first year of operation it has had an impact on all of the schools within the partnership. The model that we have developed together is offering high quality support and challenge for schools. It represents outstanding value for money too. The partnership is now well-established, understood and appreciated by all.”

For further information contact Graham Willett, Lead School Improvement Partner:
graham.willett@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Or visit the EducationKingston website:
www.educationkingston.org

Solihull – restructuring services to reduce costs and give schools greater ownership of their own improvement

Solihull has 81 schools and 4 pupil referral units. All but three of its 14 secondary schools are academies. Eighty-one per cent of primary schools are rated good or better by Ofsted, as are 69 per cent of secondary schools. In the 15 inspections since the introduction of the new Ofsted framework in September 2012, 10 schools maintained their previous judgement and five have improved their rating.

It ranks in the top five local authorities nationally across Key Stage 1 measures, including ranking 1st for reading. It also ranks 1st nationally for KS1 phonics decoding (72 per cent against a national average of 58 per cent) with the performance of free school meals pupils above the national average for all pupils.

Last year the council's school improvement service underwent a radical restructuring, following a Lean Review, which reduced costs to the council and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) from £3.25 million to £1.25 million. Despite these savings, the council provides an 'Education Improvement Adviser' to all schools, including academies, free of charge. These advisers visit their allotted schools each term and the amount of their time gifted depends on which of the three 'categories of risk' that the school falls into. The role of the adviser is to support and challenge schools and broker any improvement support necessary. They also allow the council to maintain positive engagement with all schools and monitor their performance.

Part of the aim of the restructuring was to give schools greater ownership of their own improvement and some of the savings to the DSG were used to establish and support five collaborative school improvement networks. A Strategic Accountability Board was also established, led by schools and chaired by a head teacher, to hold schools, collaboratives and the council to account for their progress in improving the attainment and achievement of all children and young people in Solihull.

For further information contact Chris Palmer, Director and Achievement and Learning: chrispalmer@solihull.gov.uk



Wigan – restructuring to embed strong school-to-school collaboration

Wigan has 134 schools with 86 per cent of its schools 'good' or outstanding. It was an 'early adopter' of a radical 'school-to-school' improvement approach and the new arrangements have been embedded for more than two years. The 2012 results are impressive. It has had its best ever results in the primary phase, with 84 per cent of children achieving Level 4+ in both English and Maths, which is up 7 per cent on 2011 and 5 per cent above national averages. At secondary level, it is the most improved local authority area in Greater Manchester, with 64 per cent of young people achieving 5+ GCSEs at A*-C (incl. English and Maths), which is up 7 per cent on 2011 and 6 per cent above the national average.

The foundation of its approach is strong and well-embedded school-to-school collaboration. This is combined with strong partnership and shared accountability between schools and the council for maximising the educational outcomes of children and young people in Wigan.

Schools work together in eight autonomous consortia (three secondary, five primary) to support self-improvement in all schools and share expertise. The structure of the consortia is not uniform and one has been established as a company. They are accountable to a phase-specific School Improvement Board which monitors the effectiveness of consortia and makes sure that all schools are receiving appropriate support. The Primary and Secondary School Improvement Boards also support the council in its school improvement functions.

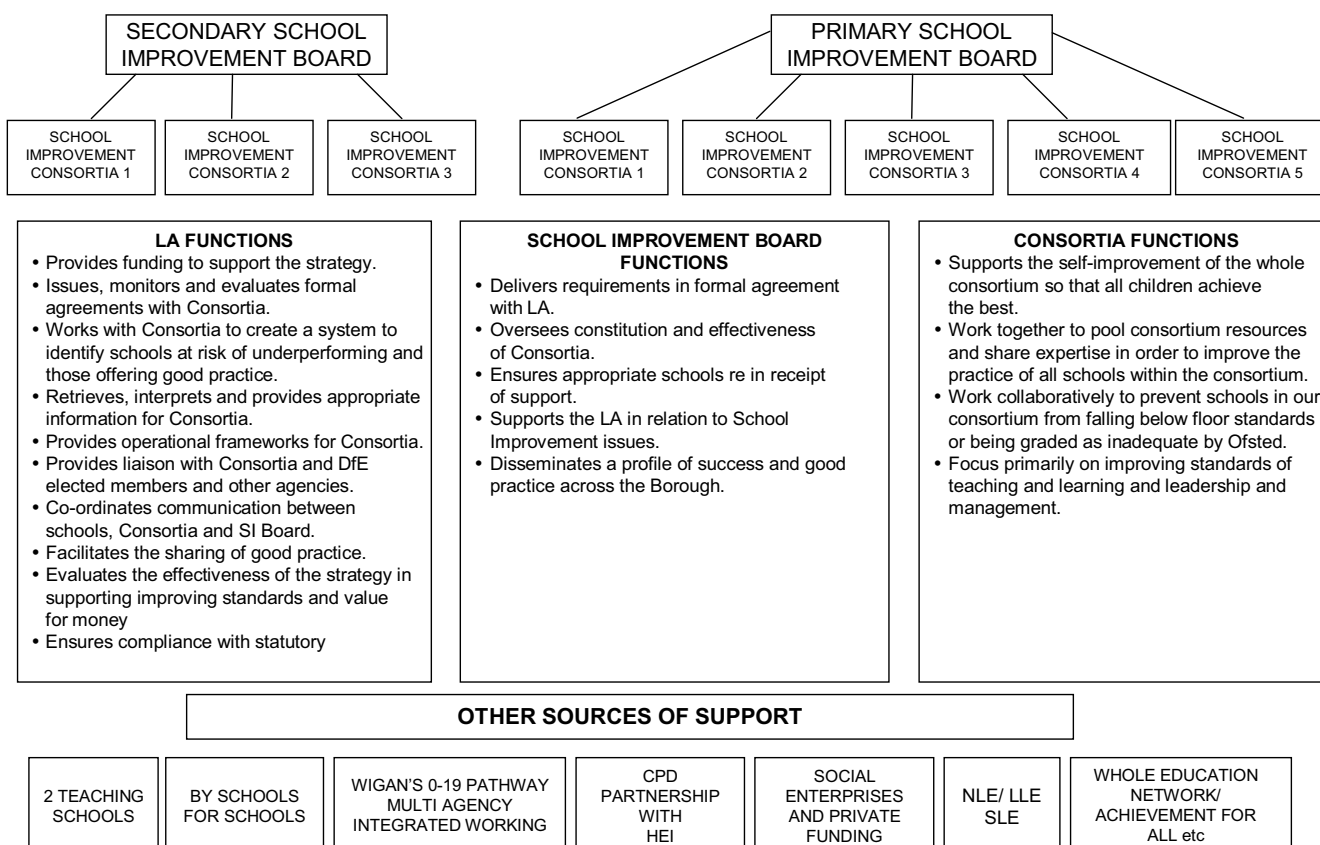
All parts of the system draw on other sources of support including two teaching schools.

The arrangements for identifying and supporting 'at risk' schools underline the centrality of school leadership in the model. The council works with the School Improvement Boards and consortia to categorise schools. But it is the responsibility of the lead head teacher of the relevant consortium to work with a school deemed to be at risk to identify areas for development and the support needed. The proposed improvement plan is then ratified and its effectiveness monitored by the Improvement Board. If a school is not showing sufficient and rapid improvement following such an intervention it would be for a consortium lead and the relevant Improvement Board to recommend a way forward, including recommending that the council should use its formal intervention powers to secure more rapid improvement.

For further information contact Kirston Nelson, Head of Service, Education:
Kirston.Nelson@wigan.gov.uk

See also the recent NFER case study of Wigan:
www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/MTSL02/MSTL02Wigancasestudy.pdf

Wigan Schools Working Collaboratively and in Partnership with Wigan Council



Maintaining a strong and wide-ranging school improvement offer for schools

Durham – providing a comprehensive traded offer to Durham schools, and across its borders

There are 267 schools in the County of Durham, including 20 academies. The percentage of children attending a good or better maintained school/PRU is 78.6 per cent (Secondary) and 72.1 per cent (Primary).

The county's school improvement service has been run as a traded service for more than 10 years and 97.5 per cent of schools and academies buy services from it through a service level agreement. This has allowed the council to maintain a large service, with 68 full-time equivalent school improvement officers. The service provides a comprehensive offer to schools, including subject specialists and inspectors who can provide support across all subject areas. It runs more than 350 courses and networks each year.

At the heart of the improvement offer is a team of Education Development Partners, all of whom are ex-Head teachers. They work closely with Durham schools to provide challenge and support and broker additional support as necessary, including from the service's Education Development Advisers. The council uses all available data to monitor the progress of schools and provides additional support and challenge to schools judged to be at risk.

The service has a long pedigree in supporting school-to-school improvement, for example, working with 27 schools in the Peterlee Partnership several years before teaching school alliances became widespread. It has formed strategic partnerships with many teaching schools in the North East, providing them with additional capacity when needed. It supports schools involved with Teach First and provides support and guidance to school improvement clusters and school federations. It has a particular specialism in leadership support and has worked with the National College for School Leadership in this area. Durham has a dedicated Leadership Centre in Spennymoor.

Although the service's main focus is schools in County Durham, it also supports schools across its borders, including in Northumberland, Sunderland, Hartlepool and Manchester. To date it has waited to be approached by schools outside the county that need support, rather than proactively marketing its offer. However, the service is partly funded by de-delegated DSG funding which is time-limited and the council will have to look at new funding models in future.

For further information contact:
margaret.hanratty@durham.gov.uk

Ealing – early identification of schools at risk within a high quality improvement offer to all schools

There are 86 schools (including six academies) in the London Borough of Ealing, with 84 per cent rated ‘good’ or better by Ofsted.

The council’s recent focus has been on improving systems for earlier identification of risks and marshalling support for schools identified as needing improvement. In the structured monitoring programme, “Ealing Challenge,” schools are given 12 months to demonstrate improvement following a benchmarking review. There are half-termly or termly challenge meetings with the head and chair of governors during this time. Monitoring works alongside an enhanced programme of support including a brokered partnership with an outstanding school.

This has had impressive results: Since the beginning of the academic year 2012/13 the number of primary schools judged ‘good’ or better under the new, more stringent inspection framework has increased by 20 per cent, reducing the numbers of



‘satisfactory’ primaries in the borough from 21 to 10. The council’s aim is for all schools to be at least ‘good’ by 2014.

But this targeted support is delivered within the context of a high quality improvement offer available to all schools in Ealing. This includes a link officer for all schools with a clear remit to provide challenge, broker support and signpost a comprehensive central professional development programme. A wide range of leadership networks and other services such as ICT, curriculum support and extended services are also offered. For primary and secondary schools, the offer is supported by a Schools Forum two-year agreed top-slice. Secondary schools subscribe to a collective offer.

Wood End Infant School, Ealing, progressed in one year from Special Measures to ‘good’ in an inspection under the new Ofsted Inspection Framework introduced in September 2012. Its Head teacher Lucy Rodgers, said:

“The school improvement service have provided consistently good support to my school through its clear analysis and advice; the provision of expertise through external LA consultants and Link Advisor; and brokering additional support with an outstanding provider. Key to this support has been the ongoing dialogue and scrutiny of the impact of our improvement actions.”

For further information contact Julie Lewis, Assistant Director Children and Adult Services – School Effectiveness: jlewis@ealing.gov.uk

Liverpool – a wide-ranging school improvement offer designed and quality assured with head teachers

Many children and young people in Liverpool live in areas of multiple deprivation and experience considerable barriers to learning and achievement. This is not regarded as either reason or excuse for failure and 81 per cent of both primary and secondary schools in the city are rated as 'good' or better by Ofsted. The city's dedicated school improvement services work in partnership with schools with the aim of providing the best quality educational provision for all Liverpool learners. Over the last three years no Liverpool school has moved into an Ofsted 'category of concern'.

School Improvement Liverpool (SIL) works with the city's maintained schools to provide a range of quality assured universal, targeted and acute services. Services are also available to the fifteen secondary academies who buy back through traded arrangements. The range of services has been designed and agreed in full consultation with head teachers who fund the arrangement through the Liverpool Schools' Forum.

SIL works with schools to monitor and evaluate performance, a process supported by the provision of a Liverpool School Improvement Partner (LSIP) to every maintained school and to academies who buy the service. Termly visits and support with head teacher performance management enables the LSIP to build up a well-focused picture of the school in its local context, keeping in mind any particular challenges faced by the leadership and management. The balance of support and challenge is

crucial to the success of the service. A local self-evaluation (SEF) document has been developed by a working group of heads and officers.

School-to-school support and collaborative learning networks are vital elements of an active and supportive school improvement programme. Relationships with national programmes including those supporting the deployment of National, Local and Specialist leaders of education are well developed and links with the city's Teaching Schools are strong.

The service provides a graduated approach to school improvement which is reviewed termly when the LSIPs visit schools. An annual exception report defines those schools causing concern based on an agreed set of triggers and such schools receive targeted and acute support services aligned to their specific needs. Schools in the most challenging circumstances and requiring targeted and acute support have either project groups or challenge boards in place to ensure the focus on sustained improvement is monitored and maintained.

SIL tailors support to meet the needs of schools. For example, at one end of the spectrum it actively supports a programme linked to succession planning for leadership and management whilst at the other end delivering effective programmes for the newest recruits to the teaching profession.

The service reports back on its performance to head teachers termly via Schools' Forum and through the recently established Liverpool Learning Partnership which represents every school. Team leaders and individual officers provide an evidence-based evaluation of their services which also demonstrates engagement with other partners and agencies.

Ofsted and HMI feedback frequently cites the quality and impact of LSIPs and school improvement services, with one HMI recently saying “thank goodness you are still here!”

For further information please contact Sue Shinkfield, Divisional Manager, School Improvement Liverpool:
sue.shinkfield@liverpool.gov.uk

Gloucestershire – working together to secure school improvement

197 out of the 239 local authority maintained schools in Gloucestershire are currently good or better. Of the 47 schools which were judged satisfactory prior to September 2012, 31 (66 per cent) are now judged to be good.

The council has well-established practices and processes in relation to underperforming schools and schools of concern that are kept under review and are frequently modified and refined. These include early intervention to tackle underperformance and support and challenge where schools are failing to make adequate provision. In addition, the council make considered and judicious use of its powers of intervention under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The Council uses a range of information and data in order to secure understanding of the quality of provision in all schools and to identify areas of weakness.

Gloucestershire’s small team of School Intervention Advisers use a standard approach to running school improvement projects and a simple set of tools to capture the information. In addition to the tools, a

‘School Improvement Journey Model’ has been developed; the model shows that over the lifetime of the improvement journey school autonomy should increase in line with the reduction of Local Authority support. The model includes regular Project Group Meetings as well as Phase Reviews where improvement is discussed and actions agreed.

Each journey follows a standard approach in the way it is recorded but allows for flexibility and freedom in the way it is carried out by those involved. The important issue is to do the right thing to improve the situation while ensuring that any risk is identified and mitigated.

In the case of vulnerable schools, those below floor standards and those judged to be inadequate by Ofsted, support is commissioned from successful schools, local and national leaders in education and external consultants. A statement of action is drawn up detailing the individualised support package, review schedule, monitoring and reporting arrangements and exit strategy. All members of the team are responsible for ensuring that appropriate interventions are in place to support vulnerable settings and vulnerable groups of children and young people. This includes working closely with multi agency groups in locality teams, to close the gaps in ethnic minority achievement, and the gaps for those in receipt of free school meals, children in care and for pupils with special educational needs.

There are several strong networks of experienced practitioners within schools in Gloucestershire; the council have identified best practice in schools and settings and there are a number of locally accredited lead schools and lead teachers. In addition, there are a high number of school leaders and teachers who have recognised national accreditations.

School Intervention Advisers are responsible for strengthening the quality assurance of school support, bringing together the range of expertise in local schools and working alongside them to drive forward school-to-school support in order to tackle local problems and broker support from excellent schools.

One of the council's strengths is the way in which it has developed its approach to schools causing concern and all schools in

recent years. The package that the council provides includes a range of tailored support and intervention from HR, finance and governor services.

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Strengthening partnerships with schools

Camden – continuously improving its partnership with schools

Ninety-seven per cent of Camden’s primary schools and 100 per cent of its secondary schools are rated by Ofsted as ‘good’ or better. Camden’s political leadership has a long history of prioritising and protecting school improvement budgets and the borough’s schools are relatively well funded by the current school funding system. It is a small authority, with 57 schools, including one sponsored academy and two primary free schools.

Budget cuts meant almost a 50 per cent reduction in the size of the school improvement service, which is now funded by a combination of council funding and by schools buying into services through a service-level agreement. Schools get four days no-cost support and challenge from ‘professional partners’ who are commissioned by the council, but are generally ex-heads or have previous experience as Ofsted inspectors. Eight out of 10 of the secondary schools and 60 per cent of primaries buy additional support through Service Level Agreements.

However, the borough is ambitious for its young people and has set out a number of challenging targets in the ‘Camden Plan’ to improve school attainment and achieve the best schools in the country within the next 10 years. One of the targets is that 50 per cent



of all schools should be rated ‘outstanding’ by 2016. It is also looking to ensure that schools are achieving uniformly good results across all Key Stages. Its two Teaching Schools (recently designated) are ambitious to play a greater role in school improvement in Camden and the council wants to lead and facilitate the development of deeper and stronger school-to-school improvement partnerships.

Camden recently held a conference involving heads, governors and other key stakeholders to make sure that school improvement evolves as an inclusive partnership between all schools and the council. It considered differing models from other authorities and agreed to set up a working group involving heads and chairs of governor representatives from primary, secondary and special schools and councillors and officers from the council

to develop a plan of action. Specifically, the working group will discuss and agree the answers to the following questions:

- What are the challenges facing Camden schools now and in the future?
- How effectively is the current model of school improvement and support meeting those challenges?
- What aspects of school improvement and support should be the initial priorities for developing a partnership approach?

The first working group meeting took place on the 26 April 2013 and participants will now meet monthly to develop a draft model for a Camden school improvement partnership.

For further information please contact Michael Shew, Interim Assistant Director Achievement:
michael.shew@camden.gov.uk

Suffolk – Raising the Bar in education

Suffolk County Council has identified education as a key corporate priority. The current performance of Suffolk schools is not acceptable. Attainment is close to the bottom of the national league tables in Key Stages 2 and 4.

‘Raising the Bar’ was launched by Councillor Mark Bee and Deborah Cadman – the Leader and Chief Executive – in June 2012. It brings together all areas of the council to focus on raising educational attainment, aspiration and outcomes across the county and to make the achievement of children and young people a real, lived priority for Suffolk.

The RSA was commissioned to conduct an independent inquiry to provide new insight and analysis, impartial advice and external challenge to the council and its education and business partners. The goal has been to contribute to a fundamental change in the way that education and skills are discussed, perceived and delivered in Suffolk. The Inquiry has involved not just the county council and schools but also business, further education, higher education, governors, Suffolk residents, MPs and national experts in designing long term solutions.

The Inquiry has focused on three themes:

- reviewing current provision of support and challenge to schools, colleges and training providers, together with opportunities for collaboration and sharing good practice
- engaging employers and the wider community in defining capability gaps of students and developing a learning offer
- building Suffolk as a learning county with high expectations and the potential to realise economic opportunities.

The RSA published its report ‘No school an island’ at the end of May 2013. It makes specific recommendations to the council and its partners about how to build a movement for educational change in the county; strengthen leadership and governance in Suffolk’s schools; enhance the quality of teaching and learning; broaden everyone’s horizons for growth, enterprise and well-being; celebrate success; and sustain long-term momentum.

The publication of the report signals a new phase for ‘Raising the Bar’. It will move from identifying solutions to implementing them. Therefore, discussion and engagement with key stakeholders after the Inquiry will need to inspire a drive for deeper collaboration, built

from the bottom up. The aim is to instil a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose that can improve opportunities and life chances for young people in Suffolk.

Suffolk's Chief Executive Deborah Cadman said:

"Education is fundamental to everything we are trying to achieve for Suffolk. Attainment across our county is not acceptable to me. And I am personally committed to making a difference. That is why I have committed resources from across the organisation to 'Raising the Bar'. We are already seeing a change – input from schools, business, governors, MPs, council staff, further and higher education has been outstanding. I believe 'Raising the Bar' will lead to a major improvement in attainment, aspirations and outcomes for young people in Suffolk. I will continue to lead and support that process."

Head teachers have also played a significant part in shaping 'Raising the Bar':

"The Castle Partnership Academy Trust (Place Farm Primary Academy and Castle Manor Academy, Haverhill) is delighted to be involved in 'Raising the Bar'. Involvement in the programme has enabled us to engage with employers and highlight the benefits of All Through Education for our children and young people."

Madeleine Vigar, Principal, Castle Partnership Academy Trust

"It has been a positive and refreshing experience to have been involved in 'Raising the Bar' because it has provided Suffolk with the opportunity to challenge, review and reflect on its educational priorities. Out of this will come a transformational approach to learning which by engaging all partners should result

in higher aspirations for all our young people. I am hoping that the 'Raising the Bar' initiative will provide a new strategic direction for Suffolk Learning which will result in high educational outcomes."

Howard Ley, Headteacher, Sammuael Ward Academy

The drive to create and promote the culture of 'Raising the Bar' has created the impetus for significant changes to take place. The climate of coasting, complacency and reliance on the local authority which existed in some Suffolk schools is being replaced with expectations of professional challenge and support across all levels of education. Headteachers have welcomed the opportunity to engage with the 'Raising the Bar' agenda:

"...All schools must be willing to support and receive support from colleagues because, as Suffolk leaders, we share the responsibility for education in our county. Local authority publications, conferences and briefings have highlighted the message that as head teachers and governors we are mutually accountable for the standards in our schools."

Andrew Berry, Headteacher, Gislingham and Palgrave Federation

For further information please contact Caroline Davison, Business Development Specialist: caroline.davison@suffolk.gov.uk

'No school an island' is available on the Suffolk County Council website: www.suffolk.gov.uk/your-council/plans-and-policies/raising-the-bar-briefing/

Bexley – Working together to strengthen the leadership of learning

There are 82 schools in Bexley and 74 per cent of primary pupils and 79 per cent of secondary students attend schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Bexley Council, in partnership with its school leaders, shares a common purpose to ensure continuous school improvement and high standards of achievement are promoted. Bexley councillors recognise the importance of strong leadership in order to facilitate excellent outcomes. All leaders in Bexley are determined to ensure its children and young people develop as confident, resilient and independent learners. Successful partnership working ensured that in 2012 no school fell below DfE floor standards and many indicators were above national averages at all key stages.

Bexley's Education Change Programme focuses on strengthening leadership, management and governance. This programme has actively encouraged effective school-to-school support, aligned to the central team of attached school improvement officers. The council is a strategic partner, together with Canterbury University, in the Bexley Teaching Schools Alliance. An increasing number of Local Leaders of Education and National Leaders of Education work with the Alliance and a team of Ofsted-accredited school progress advisers to offer appropriate support and challenge. The Alliance is led by an Outstanding Bexley Infant School. It is envisaged that the Alliance will take an increasing role in managing the development of school-to-school improvement approaches in the future.

The council knows its schools well and has a strong relationship with them, built on mutual trust and respect. The foundation of its approach is shared accountability and strong partnerships which strive to strengthen leadership at all levels, improve the quality of teaching offered to all children and young people, whilst also enhancing robust self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.

The arrangements for identifying and supporting 'at risk' schools underline the centrality of leadership in the model. The Schools Categorisation and Review Group consists of council officers and school leaders. This group collates qualitative and quantitative evidence in order to categorise all schools. This process underpins decisions regarding the most appropriate actions needed to ensure swift improvement leading to the best possible outcomes for Bexley's children and young people. The specific strategies are described in the Bexley 'Framework to Support School Improvement', which is currently being revised in partnership with schools to reflect current legislation and align with local developments.

For further information contact Jo Lakey, Acting Head of School Improvement: jo.lakey@bexley.gov.uk

Integrating school partnerships with wider council partnerships

Brighton and Hove – integrating schools into a city-wide learning partnership

The City of Brighton and Hove has 71 schools and three colleges with 80 per cent of maintained schools judged ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. It has two sponsored academies, a primary free school and a secondary free school scheduled to open in September 2013. A primary school in special measures is due to become an academy in September 2013, sponsored by the City [further education] College.

The council has worked with partners across the city to establish a cross-phase and cross-sector Learning Partnership which sets the vision and strategy for education and training in the city. It has developed a vision which aims to provide a “coherent and inclusive experience that makes learning personalised, irresistible, engaging and

enjoyable”, building on “motivating and exciting experiences that draw upon the uniqueness of our vibrant city by the sea.”

The partnership’s strategic board includes representatives from the school clusters; the further education and sixth form colleges; the city’s two universities; the adult learning partnership; the community and voluntary sector; and the council. The aim is to improve practice by bringing together the people with responsibility for policy with people with expertise in implementation and make connections to every classroom and workshop in the city.

The Learning Partnership has identified two areas for priority action where attainment in the city is below national averages – mathematics and the educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The maths project brings together the schools, universities and representatives from the business community, to raise standards and achievement in maths across the city. The ‘closing the gap’ initiative is focusing on developing best practice and implementing a city-wide strategy to improve the achievement of children and young people on free school meals and with SEND.

The work of the Learning Partnership is underpinned by a series of operational groups which provide mechanisms for city wide development projects, agreement on shared protocols and sharing of good



practice. These groups consist of both geographically based clusters, which may include primary and secondary schools, and thematic groups such as the 11 - 19 Curriculum Group, the 16 - 19 Curriculum and Standards Group and the Employer Engagement Group, which includes employers in its membership. In the secondary age groups, there is strong engagement from the city's three post-16 colleges as well as from the secondary schools. Many of these groups are in a state of transition as the local authority capacity to support them reduces, to a position where they are facilitated by the schools and colleges themselves, with the local authority remaining in partnership with them.

For further information please contact Rose Wisdom, Strategic Coordinator of the Learning Partnership:
rose.wisdom@brighton-hove.gov.uk

See also the recent NFER case study on Brighton and Hove:
www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/MTSL02/MSTL02BrightonandHovecasestudy.pdf

Sunderland – encouraging joint working between schools and local businesses

In 2012 Sunderland's schools achieved good results in all key measures across all Key Stages, comparing well both regionally and with statistical neighbours. In Key Stage 2 the percentage of 11 year olds achieving combined English and Maths at level 4 + has increased from 74 per cent to 81 per cent – above the national average. At Key Stage 4, 63 per cent of 16 year olds achieved five higher grade GCSEs including English and Maths – an 8 per cent increase on last year's figures and ahead of the national average for the first time.

However, the North East Independent Economic Review¹: launched in April 2013 highlighted that young people in the region were not achieving at the same level, and in the same numbers as elsewhere in the country. It recommended that all local partners in the North East should “work together to raise school standards, to double the number of apprenticeships and to do more to encourage young people from the region into higher education.”

One of the ways that this recommendation is being taken forward in Sunderland is through the city's business-led Economic Leadership Board. This has established a Business: Schools Task Group with representatives from business, schools and the local authority. It is working to develop and enhance business engagement activity for every school and business that wants it

¹ More and Better Jobs: North East International:
www.nelep.co.uk/ne-economic-review

The group's first high profile project is Sunderland's 'Work Discovery Week' which is designed to forge links between students and employers and give young people a taste of the working world. The event, running between 1 and 5 July 2013, will kick off at the Stadium of Light with talks from inspirational speakers who will relay their experiences and provide key pointers for today's young people preparing to enter the world of work for the first time. There will be an interactive day of activities for young people organised and facilitated by businesses, with business personnel leading workshops and discussion groups on interview preparation and practice, application processes and procedures, problem-solving and communication. Over 30 businesses have already committed to supporting the event, including; Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK, Liebherr-Sunderland Works Ltd and Arriva North East to name but a few.

Throughout the week there will be activities such as business-hosted open days, a city bus tour highlighting Sunderland's business areas and fashion shows with models showing the right clothes to wear at work and for interviews. The week will conclude at the Stadium of Light on Friday 5 July with presentations by the schools in response to a 'problem-solving challenge' to an audience of business representatives.

Gary Hutchinson, commercial director of Sunderland AFC and co-chair of the task group, said:

"Work Discovery Week-Sunderland 2013 will provide a superb opportunity for businesses to showcase their industry sector, the products they make and/or the services they deliver to the young people

who could be the employees of the future.

"Individual schools across the city have established relationships with a number of businesses over the years and it is our hope that this event will help those existing relationships to flourish and forge new ones."

For further information contact Vince Taylor, Head of Strategy and Performance, Sunderland City Council:
vince.taylor@sunderland.gov.uk

Other resources

'What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier'

Aston, H., Easton, C., Sims, D., Smith, R., Walker, F., Crossley, D., Crossley-Holland, J. (2013). Slough: NFER:
<http://tinyurl.com/lf3d99q>

'LGA/DfE action research on the council role in education' July 2012

<http://tinyurl.com/puxjw7f>

'Filling the Gap: The Championing Role of English Councils in Education'

SOLACE April 2012:
<http://tinyurl.com/nw5xvcp>

'The Missing Link: The evolving role of the local authority in school improvement'

ADCS April 2012
www.adcs.org.uk/schoolscausingconcern/index.html



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