



The Kent Challenge - Tackling Underperformance in Schools

1. Introduction

Kent County Council is committed to improving educational outcomes for the children and young people of Kent. There is much to celebrate in Kent schools, with evidence of outstanding leadership and classroom practice, innovation and dynamism. However, we also know that performance in some schools does not meet the high standards we expect and which the families and children of Kent deserve. We share the Secretary of State's concern that 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. We acknowledge that some schools face specific challenges, and accept that part of our leadership role is to help them overcome these challenges, as well as creating an environment in which high performing schools can improve further as part of a self-sustaining network.

The Secretary of State has asked us to draw up a plan for improving the performance in all schools, excluding Academies, below the floor. He has challenged us to be ambitious, and we hope this plan meets that challenge.

1.1. Context and Analysis

Kent has 213,432 pupils on roll and a total of 572 schools (including 31 Academies). This figures comprises 99 secondary schools (27 Academy, 27 Grammar, 31 High and 14 Wide Ability Schools), 449 primary (4 Academy, 33 Infant, 32 Junior and 380 Primary), and 24 Special Schools. Additionally Kent has 62 Independent Schools.

1.2. Ofsted Data

In Kent 60.3% of schools are deemed to be Good or outstanding, with 3.6% in a Category, and the remaining 36.1% satisfactory. However, the Overall Effectiveness judgement from Ofsted inspections is further analysed to provide additional information regarding schools performance. Schools graded 'Good' overall are further broken down to show those that are *good with outstanding features*. These are schools where the overall effectiveness is good and at least two of the following aspects are outstanding: Capacity for sustained improvement, achievement, safety, behaviour, healthy lifestyles, teaching & learning.

Similarly, schools rated satisfactory are further analysed to provide information about schools that are *borderline satisfactory*. These are schools where overall effectiveness is judged to be only satisfactory *and* achievement, teaching and leadership & management are also only satisfactory. The following table shows the county-wide picture.

Ofsted Overall Effectiveness Grade*	Primary	Secondary	Special	PRU	Total
Outstanding	50	26	2	2	80
Good with outstanding features	105	23	15	4	147
Good	101	15	3	4	123
Satisfactory	47	10	3	1	61
Borderline satisfactory	127	14	1	7	149
Notice to Improve	8	2	0	0	10
Special Measures	10	1	0	0	11

*Overall effectiveness by latest inspection, based on published reports as of 4 April 2011 (including schools amalgamated/closed since last inspection)

The most noticeable feature of the table is the number of primary schools in the borderline satisfactory category.

1.3. Performance vs Statistical Neighbours/National Indicators

Kent monitors performance against National Indicators as well as 10 statistical neighbours (East Sussex, Essex, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire,

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Staffordshire, Swindon, Warwickshire, West Sussex and Worcestershire). In summary, our performance at each key stage is as follows. The results show a county-wide level of performance frequently in-line with, and often exceeding national averages and statistical neighbours.

1.3.1. Foundation Stage

61% of children now reach the level of development considered as good. This is the fifth year in succession that Kent's Foundation Stage outcomes have shown improvement, and Kent's performance now exceeds national performance, and is in the upper quartile of all authorities.

In addition, for the fourth year in succession Kent has reduced the achievement gap between children in the lowest 20% of the cohort and their peers, further extending performance when compared against the national average.

1.3.2. KS1

At Level 2b for Reading, results improved by 0.6% from last year, with Kent schools achieving 72.3%, which is above national performance. At the higher Level 3, Kent schools continue to perform above the national average by 1%. As a result of these improvements, the average point score for reading in Kent has risen to its highest level of 15.8 and is above national levels.

In writing, at Level 2, standards improved by 1% against 2009 level results to give the best ever performance for Kent. Standards improved slightly at Level 2b with performance just below the national average. Standards at the higher Level 3 exceed the national level by 1.7%.

Standards in mathematics at Level 2 were maintained in Kent and in national performance. At Level 2b Kent's performance is now ahead of national, which dipped by 1%. At the higher Level 3, Kent schools are slightly above the national average.

At Level 2 in reading, Kent was in line with national performance at 85% and in joint 8th place with Nottinghamshire. Kent's performance at Level 2 in writing was slightly below the national performance and in joint 9th place with Lancashire in the ranking of statistical neighbours. Level 2 performance in mathematics was equal to the national average of 89% and was joint 9th in the rankings with Lancashire and East Sussex.

At the higher level 3, Kent was ranked joint 7th for reading and 6th for writing. At Key Stage 1, L2, Kent's girls out-performed boys in all subjects. In Mathematics the gap between girls and boys performance equalled that of its statistical neighbours and the national performance at 3%.

1.3.3. KS2

In 2010, Kent improved its performance in English and Mathematics combined by 2%, from 68% to 70%. The number of schools below the (then) 55% national floor target reduced from 78 to 64.

Pupil progress by two levels between Key Stages 1 to 2 was 82.8% in English (National Indicator 93), an increase of 1.5% on 2009, and 77% in Mathematics (National Indicator 94), a decrease of 1.5% from 2009.

1.3.4. KS4

In 2010, pupils achieved their best ever results with 79.3% achieving 5+ A*-C at GCSE or equivalent, a further 6.3% improvement on performance in 2009 (73%). This ranks Kent first amongst its statistical neighbours and is 3.9% above the national figure (75.4%).

For 5A*-C including English and mathematics Kent achieved 56.8%, this is 3.4% above the national and earns the county second position amongst statistical neighbours.

1.4. New Floor Standard

Of the 99 secondary schools, 11 currently fall below the new floor standard criteria. We expect that **3** of these will meet or exceed the target in 2011, leaving **8** schools for which we need to have an improvement plan. Of the 449 primary schools, **72** fall below the criteria, though **50** are predicted to meet or exceed the floor standards this year, leaving **22** schools below the floor. We expect, therefore, that a total of **30** schools will be below the floor in 2011.

However, a number of schools are predicting results that place them not far above the floor targets, and despite robust analysis of predicted outcomes, it is possible that some schools will not meet the required standards. In at least 10 schools, one child's results will account for a 5% variation in the school's performance. In addition, there has been considerable volatility of performance in some schools, and given the size of the County it is inevitable that schools currently not forecast to be below the floor in 2011 will, nevertheless, end up in that situation.

The high number of schools below the floor in 2010, the variability of performance, the size of the cohort of some schools, and the projected rise in the floor in future years, taken alongside our ambition to see improved outcomes in all schools in Kent, suggests that our improvement strategy must reach beyond the 30 schools not predicted to meet the current targets.

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We have already begun to work on this. In September 2010, a new school improvement model was introduced in Kent, following a significant appraisal of the impact of the former model, a restructure of the resources and a restatement of Kent's priorities and commitment to ensuring the highest quality of educational provisions for all schools. Designed around 12 districts, the model now in practice has clear expectations of school performance and pupil attainment, and robust lines of accountability to ensure that Kent's Children and Young People receive the highest quality education possible in every school.

We now propose taking this to the next stage. In our view, a plan for addressing underachievement in just 30 schools does not pass the secretary of states challenge that we are ambitious. We will therefore build on our new model to help deliver a **County wide school improvement strategy, embracing all schools**; this is an improvement plan for 572 schools.

2. Our proposition

We acknowledge that in recent years our approach may have become too insular, and that we may not have been sufficiently welcoming of proven improvement strategies from elsewhere. However, we have been impressed by the transformation in standards that has been achieved in London as part of the London Challenge approach, and note the successful transfer of that approach to Manchester and the Black Country. We have also seen significant impact from National Strategies work in the secondary sector. We intend, therefore, to establish the Kent Challenge, and seek DfE support in its implementation.

Like the London version, we want Kent Challenge to shine a spotlight on the reasons for low performance of schools and the underachievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities. We wish to mobilise the best resources in Kent and beyond – experienced head teachers, Advanced Skills Teachers, specialist teachers providing support for pupils with learning difficulties and for those with EAL – to support the schools that cannot easily take advantage of them. At a time when many schools are concerned about autonomy and fragmentation, our ambitious programme will bring together the many central reforms and local initiatives into a coherent programme that works across the County to deliver tangible benefits to pupils.

Kent Challenge will be a partnership between Kent County Council, schools, central government, and other key players who can contribute to improved outcomes. Through sharing of data and intelligence about common issues, survey evidence about the views of pupils and parents, and best practice, we will identify County-wide problems and develop shared solutions to them, drawing upon practical support from the Department for Education and professionals from other parts of the country.

The main features of our programme will include:

2.1. Intensive support for Priority Schools

A new model for school challenge and support was introduced in September 2010. Key Principles of the Strategy include:

- A detailed and ongoing analysis of all schools to identify those that are a priority for support, challenge and intervention in the right mix, dependant on the situation
- Early and rigorous intervention and action for those schools where leadership and/or the quality of teaching is impacting adversely on pupil progress and attainment
- A clear plan for improvement, six weekly progress meetings to identify impact of the support in place and clearly defined outcomes for improvement
- Ensuring that support for groups or individuals who might be vulnerable, finds it rightful place at the heart of whole school improvement
- A clear line of accountability which states expectations of the key stakeholders in improving the school, including the Head teacher and staff, the Governing body and the school improvement team linked to the school.
- An understanding that if schools do not make the expected progress the following actions are considered: the serving of a Warning Notice; introducing an Interim Executive Board; changes to the leadership structure; Federation or amalgamation; or conversion to an academy.

Part of the support available to schools is provided through National and Local Leaders of Education (N/LLE). Kent holds a protocol for the deployment of N/LLEs in order that the deployment:

- is effective in providing support to identified schools
- provides the opportunity for Leaders to use and grow their coaching skills
- enables the Local Authority and schools to work in partnership to secure improvement

Currently 31 Primary and 15 Secondary N/LLEs are actively allocated to one or more Kent schools. An additional 30 individuals are in the process of applying for accreditation and training.

The intensive support programme model is streamlined, expectations are transparent and intervention rigorous. The model uses all available resources in order to effect improvement in a cost effective and sustainable framework through the resources available to the Local Authority. However, as part of our new Kent Challenge programme, we will wish to further refine the model, drawing on best practice from elsewhere, to ensure it is delivering the maximum benefits.

2.2. A county-wide leadership strategy led by school leaders for school leaders

The leadership strategy will include consultant leaders for primary and secondary schools, and holistic support for weak schools across their whole leadership teams. Succession planning will be an integral part of the strategy.

The Workforce & Development team is responsible for the implementation of the existing Kent Leadership Strategy and the development of leadership for schools and early years settings, at all levels, to ensure that every school and setting has high quality effective leadership and governance. It also supports schools to be self evaluating and Headteachers to be leaders in their localities and communities. It supports the development of over 7500 governors and approximately 28,000 staff in Kent schools. It is accountable for the statutory implementation of school workforce remodelling and the implementation of the key priorities for Kent supporting schools to work collaboratively in building capacity and quality in the workforce, moving towards a model of schools supporting schools.

We expect the Kent Challenge will review the effectiveness of our existing approaches to ensure that our leadership strategy is fit for the future.

2.3. A tailored package of support for disadvantaged students

Working in partnership with schools we will identify barriers to learning for deprived students in each district of the County and develop bespoke support programmes for them. This is likely to include:

- Robust analysis using accurate data and good local knowledge
- engaging young people in shaping and evaluating services
- ensuring equality of access to provision
- challenging discrimination
- individual and group based approaches to learning
- advice support and training for schools
- sharing best practice
- monitoring impact and outcomes

2.4. A data-rich approach to solving local issues and sharing learning

School improvement will be targeted using data from several sources, analysed to ensure a thorough understanding of challenges faced by schools. Data sources include (but are not limited to) Making Figures Speak, RaiseOnline and EPAS. Families of Schools data (grouping schools by prior attainment and socio-economic factors) allows schools to benchmark themselves against like schools and identify similar schools with whom to learn and share best practice.

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There will also be a thorough analysis of key issues across Kent, such as recruitment, mobility and teaching standards, in order to develop evidence based solutions.

2.5. Promoting networking as a key tool for school improvement

Networking between schools is, and increasingly will be, a fundamental building block of school improvement. Kent will promote networking and school to school support based not only on geography and the type of school but also related to the challenges faced and the position of best practice within the county. As part of the Kent Challenge we will improve and enhance our role as brokers of support.

2.6. Local solutions to local issues

Kent is a diverse county. Within the over-arching County-wide strategy we will therefore encourage local solutions for local issues, based on the 12 district areas. Since last September, schools in each district are supported through a District Head for Primary Standards and School Improvement. District Heads for Secondary Standards and School Improvement support secondary schools across three districts. Since September the District Heads have worked collaboratively with colleagues to establish a 'team around the school' model that includes School Improvement Advisers, Teaching and Learning Advisers, Early Years Advisers, Minority Communities Achievement Service and Specialist Teaching Service support, and Inclusion and Achievement Officers.

In addition, there are 3 Area Education Officers each covering 4 districts within East, Mid and West Kent respectively, who provide advice, support and guidance to schools on a range of leadership and governance issues. The AEOs also exercise the statutory intervention powers of the Local Authority when this is the necessary to secure effective leadership and governance, as well as leading on structural solutions where these may be required. As the intervention arm of the Local Authority the AEOs work closely with the District Heads of Standards to ensure a continuum of advice, support and challenge as appropriate and to ensure synergy and coherence between school organization and school improvement strategies within any given locality.

The capacity of this team is enhanced by drawing upon expertise within the district itself through:

- School to school support
- Use of external expertise
- National and local Leaders of Education and other outstanding Head teachers.
- Advanced Skills Teachers
- Leading Teachers
- Other outstanding school personnel

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This mix of Local Authority and school resource and expertise provides the balance of *support, challenge and intervention* and is well placed to meet the requirements of tackling underperformance as well as the wider role of facilitating, enabling and quality assuring school to school support.

2.7. A strategy to secure choice and diversity of education for families and modern learning environments fit for the 21st century

Our programme will be aligned with a countywide analysis of provision as part of the local authority's role in ensuring that every child has access to good provision. This analysis will identify need, based on demography, faith or parental demand and suggest solutions to which the market will be encouraged to respond.

We will invest in the quality of secondary provision through high quality specialist vocational facilities. We will develop a diverse curriculum offer through a wide range of vocational programmes which will provide appropriate personalised learning pathways and effective transition support. This will successfully underpin our other school improvement strategies.

2.8. Governance

Kent Challenge will be overseen by a Challenge Board. The Board will comprise representatives from the school sector, local authority elected members, school improvement advisers, both from the County Council and the private sector, and expert advisers from the Department for Education.

2.9. Outcomes

Detailed outcomes will be identified by the Challenge Board at the start of the programme, but in general terms we would expect that we will see:

- a sharp drop in underperforming schools, particularly those schools in the primary sector deemed to be borderline satisfactory
- more outstanding schools
- significant improvements in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.
- improvements in the quality of leadership and management in Kent schools and increased leadership capacity.
- an improved teaching and learning profile such that at least 80% of the teaching in Kent schools is good or better and all teaching is satisfactory.
- improvement in the quality of assessment practices in Kent schools such that tracking of children's learning, accurate target setting and regular, consistent monitoring of pupil progress enables accelerated progress
- an improvement in capacity through partnerships with good and outstanding schools

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3. Identifying Priority schools

A differentiated programme of support, challenge and intervention is currently based on a thorough and on-going analysis of school performance which places schools in one of three categories based on a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) system:

Category		Classification
Green		Schools rated Outstanding or Good for overall effectiveness at the last inspection
		Good/better results and standards
		Strong leadership
Amber	Priority Schools	2 years below floor standard (60%) OR
		In a 3 year declining trend OR
		Borderline satisfactory at last inspection
Red	Priority Schools	In Ofsted category (NTI/SM) OR
		2 years below floor standard

We are clear in our categorisation of all our Primary and Secondary schools and use the RAG system to identify, monitor, deploy and quality assure our resources against this criteria. The renewed government focus to tackle underperformance aligns with this categorisation system. We are clear in our expectation that no school will be below the floor standards and that all schools should at least match if not exceed national averages of progress in the English and Maths progress measures.

Amber and Red schools comprise the *priority schools* and are the focus for challenge and intervention by the district team, led and managed by the District Head of Standards and School Improvement.

These schools:

- Are subject to full school reviews leading to an individual action plan for improvement
- Attend 6 weekly, or in some cases monthly, formal progress Review meetings
- Receive additional professional development and training for Governors, staff and the Headteacher

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- Receive fortnightly (or in some cases, weekly visits by the District Head (S&SI) or the School Improvement Adviser to monitor impact and improvement
- Are expected to demonstrate rapid improvement in the quality of teaching and learning with no teaching judged as less than satisfactory and the majority of teaching good or better. The quality of teaching is monitored through joint observation with the Headteacher and the District Head (Standards and School Improvement) and pupil progress is monitored through the School Improvement Adviser with teachers and subject leaders in schools.

The secondary sector has also built on the lessons learnt from National Challenge (NC) and has been able to effect considerable improvement through the National Strategies programme, the London Challenge link advisers, implementation of Kagan Structures¹, becoming a hub for PiXL² and investigating joining with the London Teaching schools programme. The 'sign up' up to the NC programme has meant that 33 schools 'in Challenge' have subsequently reduced to 4. The sharing of good practice through National Challenge conferences has become a sustainable feature of building effective school to school improvement networks and the LA seeks to build on this in its improvement strategy to transfer good practice into the Primary sector.

¹ Kagan Structures: The Kagan approach improves the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools by using a range of specific group and pair work techniques to improve pupil engagement and progress.

² The PiXL Club: A network of schools and school leaders working collaboratively to improve KS4 outcomes through mentoring, coaching and sharing good practice.