

The Kent Challenge

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. We know that some schools face specific challenges, and we 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.

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.

The Secretary of State has asked us to draw up a plan for improving the performance in all schools, excluding academies, below the floor standards. He has challenged us to be ambitious. 'Kent Challenge – Tackling Underperformance in our schools' is our response to that challenge which will see us using the best practice in Kent schools to ensure we create a sustainable school to school improvement network by 2015.

Working in partnership with all Kent schools we expect to achieve the following aims:

- Improve outcomes for all pupils in Kent schools at a faster rate than is currently occurring
- Ensure that Kent schools perform better than the national average
- Provide support for schools to break the link between disadvantage and low attainment
- Ensure access to high quality learning experiences for all children and young people whilst raising aspirations and expectations for every child
- Maximise achievement for all children and young people
- Establish excellent system leadership between networks of schools, recognising schools autonomy, that allows effective partnerships to be established or built upon enabling the needs of all learners in the district to be tackled quickly and progress to be accelerated.
- Create bespoke programmes tailored to meet local needs using some of the proven approaches to school improvement

Kent Challenge will also make a significant contribution to the Governments stated aims to:

- Raise the educational achievement of all children and young people
- Narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers with particular focus to Looked After Children.

Differentiating the Kent Challenge

Within the overall aims as set out in the previous section for ensuring improvement in all Kent Schools, there is a Specific Partnership Approach for those schools who meet the criteria laid down by the DfE in March 2011.

- Currently in an Ofsted category
- Meets the DfE criteria for underperformance: below the floor standard of 60% primary or 35% secondary in 2011, and below the progress measures for English and/or Maths. We await the publication of the progress measures for 2011.
- Below the floor standard for 5 consecutive years
- Below the floor standard for 3 out of the last 5 years
- Due an Ofsted inspection in 2011-2012 with potential triggers from external monitoring reports around Leadership and Management, Teaching and Learning, Attendance and behaviour, safeguarding and parental complaints

The Opportunities for Non- Specific Partnership Approach schools

We will be working with all schools in establishing a successful school to school support system within districts, areas and across Kent as a whole. We will use the best practice wherever it is to be found. The majority of Kent schools, including those judged as satisfactory, have good and outstanding practice which can be shared for the benefit of their communities. We also know that school to school support sows benefits for all schools working in a collaborative approach.

We will therefore look to commission a wide range of support from individual schools, teaching schools, networks and academies when facilitating school improvement on an individual or geographical basis.

Building on the effectiveness of the District Model

A new model for school challenge and support was introduced in September 2010. This has been very effective in supporting school improvement across Kent and has resulted in a reduction by 30% of schools that were identified as being serious concerns and an increase by 9% of schools who are now good or outstanding. The success of this work can be attributed to the district team approach and the partnership arrangement between the school, the Local Authority (LA) and commissioned resources. We therefore intend to ensure that the strengths of this model continue to support school improvement across all Kent schools at a district and area level.

Key Principles of the District Strategy have included:

- A detailed and ongoing analysis of all schools to identify those that are a priority for support, challenge and intervention in the right mix, dependent 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 its 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

The Specific Partnership Approach

This Specific Partnership Approach is a four year programme which will be developed in partnership with schools, the DfE and external providers. It is expected that those schools identified through the criteria and involved in the Specific Partnership Approach will make significant progress in the first two years of this programme followed by continued and sustained improvement in the second two year period. This programme recognises the need for serious, bold and at times difficult decisions to be made to

ensure that Kent schools perform in excess of national expectations on a range of benchmarks. The aims of the partnership programme are those outlined in the first section.

Success Indicators of the Specific Partnership Approach will be:

- A reduction of at least 75% in underperforming schools, particularly focusing on English and Maths (as defined by the DfE criteria)
- An increase in the proportions of good and outstanding schools as defined by Ofsted and the Local Authority
- A significant reduction in the gaps between educational outcomes for all but particularly for disadvantaged children and young people
- Kent recognised as a national example of good practice in many areas of school improvement

Research base for the Specific Partnership Approach

We know that evidence from London Challenge and City Challenge as well as our own Secondary National Challenge experience suggests that schools that have been involved in such challenge partnerships:

- Perform better and improve at a faster rate than schools in terms of exam results in both secondary and primary
- The percentage of schools judged outstanding significantly increases following involvement in the programme
- A lower % of schools fall into an Ofsted category
- School leaders and teachers in the monitoring and evaluation processes reflected that they were more motivated to think beyond their own schools resulting in a greater quantity and improved quality of successful collaboration activities. This is a key driver for improvement.

Benefits of being involved in a Specific Partnership Approach

- An accurate audit of need
- A much faster brokering of the necessary resources to support identified priorities
- Effective chairing of the regular school improvement boards to monitor and review progress

- Embedded the use of performance data to track pupil progress and steer intervention and secured high quality teaching.

What can schools expect from involvement in the Specific Partnership Approach

PLEASE NOTE: We know that many Headteachers and their Governing Bodies know their school, their priorities and the action needed to make the improvements to drive up standards. The Specific Partnership Approach will acknowledge that and positively support by ensuring that the schools receive the resource they need to achieve their ambitions. In some cases this may not involve additional resource with the exception of the monitoring arrangements for school improvement.

Key Elements of the Specific Partnership Approach

- A 2 year partnership with intensive support from a Kent Challenge Adviser (KCA), and a tailored package aimed at raising standards and building capacity for sustained improvement.
- A further 2 year sustainability package that secures rapid improvements.
- Access to recognised and agreed resource quickly
- An appreciation of the significant challenges that some schools face and a determination on the part of the Local Authority, as part of the Kent Challenge, to reduce the socio economic barriers to learning where at all possible
- By the end of the initial 2 year partnership work the Local Authority role will diminish as the local network takes over

Resources for the Specific Partnership Approach

Any funding allocation from the Local Authority for Specific Partnership Approach will be based on the audit of need and not on a formula basis. The Local Authority will access both central resource and will be able to commission resource from Edukent and external providers as identified in any agreed individual school plans.

There will be an expectation that all parties involved in the wider Kent Challenge, will use their best practice to develop the schools supporting schools network in their districts or areas.

The Raising Attainment Plan, based on the statement of action format, where required and agreed with the school, will identify personnel, funding and activity that will be required to strengthen the schools capacity for sustained improvement.

Leadership Strategy and Teaching and learning Strategy

We know that effective leadership, management and governance are essential to achieving the highest performance in schools. They underpin the success of other intentions and help ensure that improvements are sustainable. Kent has an expectation that all school leaders will wish to work together to ensure that all children and young people in Kent achieve the highest possible standards in learning. This does not mean just having strong Headteachers, there must be excellent leadership across all levels in a school if we are to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people regardless of their ability levels.

Succession planning will be a significant aspect of the strategy.

A critical strategy development in challenge programmes across the country has been the development of a leadership and a teaching and learning strategy. Kent, in conjunction with schools, the DfE, National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and external providers will develop a leadership programme and a teaching and learning programme that enables schools to develop excellence in both areas. The intention is to design a strategy that reflects the most effective practice i.e. collaborative working. We will therefore be looking to commission activity from centres of excellence both internally and externally. This will include Teaching Schools, Outstanding schools, National Leaders of Education (NLE's), Local Leaders of Education (LLE's) and experienced practitioners across all schools in Kent.

The Specific Partnership Approach

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a memorandum of understanding between the school, the Local Authority and the DfE that no structural solution will be entered into during the rapid improvement phase of the Specific Partnership Approach unless agreed by ALL parties.

- Identification of schools in a specific partnership approach where we need to strengthen their ability to make and sustain improvement (See criteria in above paper)
- Allocating a Kent Challenge Adviser
- Kent Challenge Adviser with District Head visits school to talk through the specific partnership approach required to meet the school's priorities and achieve the required improvement in standards/progress measures. To discuss with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors roles, responsibilities and expectations of all involved in the partnership programme. This will include clear expectation of School leadership during the rapid improvement phase of the Challenge programme.
- A formal letter from the Local Authority confirms the schools involvement in a specific partnership approach.
- Kent Challenge Adviser completes an audit of need with Headteacher and school leadership team based on available data. This will include a finance review supported by Local Authority Finance team where appropriate.
- Kent Challenge Adviser works with school leadership to develop the Raising Attainment Plan. This will identify key issues and resource needs as well as timescales and personnel together with monitoring and review arrangements. Contributions to any resources to be agreed by all parties. This plan will also include the timescale for exit from the specific partnership approach. Any resources identified in the Raising Attainment Plan will be brokered by the Kent Challenge Adviser.

- Kent Challenge Adviser establishes the school improvement partnership board with the school leadership, governance, National Leader of Education etc. dates for the 6 weekly Specific Partnership Approach Boards are set. **These boards to be chaired by the Kent Challenge Adviser in the first instance.**
- Kent Challenge Adviser to submit 6 weekly progress reports to central board (This includes DfE, Heads, Local Authority and others) **Please note judgements against the key issues will be made every 6 weeks at the board meetings. Any judgement of Inadequate will require the board to consider further intervention powers including alternative leadership, the implementation of an Interim Executive Board or the withdrawal of delegated powers.**