

Literacy, numeracy and language developments built into Birmingham's community strategy for neighbourhood renewal

Within the Partnership each partner was responsible for its own set of developments, and whilst these were all contained within a longer term Partnership set of 10-15 year aspirations. This broader vision of the partnership was itself written into the city of Birmingham's Neighbourhood Renewal/Community Strategy. This overarching document outlined Birmingham's work (on six themes: learning, safety, health, employment, environment and housing) to progressively close the gaps between standards in the best neighbourhoods and standards in the worst neighbourhoods and to ensure that no neighbourhood was left with standards below a minimum level ('floor target').

In 2004-5, and again in 2005-6, the learning theme contained a commitment for agencies to work together on developments:

- to improve the language of young children, by the engagement of their families
- to raise levels of English/Maths in primary schools
- to raise attainment levels in secondary schools and for young people aged 14-19
- to focus on improving levels of adult basic skills
- to focus on the achievements of particular groups/in particular localities

This commitment to continue the development work in key core skills was a natural progression from the partnership's work 1995-2003.

The learning strand of the 2005-6 Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy follows:

Thematic Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Learning Theme

Introduction

Improving educational attainment in disadvantaged communities is a key aim of the national neighbourhood renewal strategy. It is also a key objective of Birmingham's newly revised Community Strategy, which argues that learning and skills are key to the prosperity of Birmingham and the people who live in the city.

The public service agencies in Birmingham which are responsible for learning have been working for the last decade to raise overall levels of educational achievement and close the gap between the city and national averages. They have also ensured that there is a focus on specific groups which are underachieving, both in absolute and in relative terms, so that as overall levels of achievement have risen, the achievement gaps between these groups and city averages should narrow. Key groups here are children from some black and minority ethnic background, children in care, and children living in low-income households.

Progress to date

This section summarises performance on the floor targets and local priorities.

Foundation stage

The Foundation Stage Profile was first introduced in the school year 2002-03. Results from 2004 show that about half of Birmingham children were achieving early learning goals in personal and physical development, but aspects of literacy and mathematics were weaker. Because this is a new assessment process, comparisons with national data and across the city need to be treated with caution.

Key Stage 2

In 2004 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 and above in English increased by 5 per cent to 74 per cent, meeting the city's target. In mathematics, the proportion achieving level 4 increased by 2 per cent to 69 per cent (compared to a target of 73 per cent). Since 1999, the proportion of Birmingham pupils achieving Level 4 in English has increased by 9 per cent compared to 7 per cent nationally; in mathematics, the increase has been 4 per cent compared to 6 per cent nationally.

The number of schools failing to meet the threshold target of 65 per cent in English fell from 99 in 2003 to 74 in 2004, but stayed the same (107 schools) in mathematics.

Analysis by ward shows that no ward fell below the 65 per cent threshold in English, though 10 wards fell below 70 per cent. In mathematics, 10 wards fell below the 65 per cent threshold, with two wards falling below 60 per cent. Improvement rates have been highest in those wards with lowest overall levels of attainment.

Key Stage 3

In 2004 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 and above in English increased by 2 per cent to 63 per cent; in mathematics the increase was 4 per cent to 66 per cent. Results for ICT, however, remained unchanged at 59 per cent, while the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 in science declined by 1 per cent to 57 per cent. Since 1999 the proportion of pupils in Birmingham achieving Level 5 has risen 16 per cent in mathematics and 13 per cent in science, compared to 11 per cent nationally in both subjects. Comparative data for English is not available for 2004; figures for 2003 suggest improvement in Birmingham had been slightly slower than nationally.

The number of schools that failed to meet the threshold target of 50 per cent fell in 2004 for both English (26 to 21) and mathematics (23 to 14). However the number failing to meet the threshold increased for science from 30 to 33. Analysis by ward shows seven wards fell below the 50 per cent threshold in English and four below the threshold in mathematics.

GCSEs

In 2004 the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C was 51.2 per cent, an increase of 1.8 per cent from 2003. Since 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grade GCSEs has risen by 13 per cent compared to 5 per cent nationally.

Just five schools failed to meet the threshold target of 25 per cent in 2004, compared to eight in 2003 and 29 in 1999. No ward fell below the 25 per cent threshold in 2004, but two fell below 30 per cent and eight fell below 40 per cent. While some wards have shown significant improvements, others with below average levels of attainment have showed declines in performance.

Performance and ethnicity

In the past the attainment of Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage children has been below the average for Birmingham, while the attainment of Indian heritage children was above average. For some communities, improvements in attainment over the past five years have been quicker than the city average. Levels of attainment of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children have increased more quickly than city averages at all Key Stages, and these are now close to city averages.

Attainment by Black Caribbean girls has improved at a rate above the city average, but improvements by Black Caribbean boys has been slower, and attainment levels remain significantly below the average for the city at GCSE. The performance of Black African heritage children shows least improvement over the last five years. Improvements in attainment in secondary schools has been slower than average, while in primary schools, attainment levels have fallen. This reflects an increase in the number of recent arrivals to the city, especially of Somali children.

Performance and poverty

The impact of low income on educational attainment in Birmingham is shown by analysis of performance by eligibility for free school meals. This shows that pupils in eligible for free schools tend to perform below the city average. In addition, while eligibility for free school meals reduces attainment for all ethnic groups, the impact of poverty varies, and appears greatest for white children.

Attainment of looked after children

Birmingham has identified children looked after by the Council as at particular risk of underachieving. These children are more likely to have a disrupted education and to have a statement of special educational needs. Provisional results for 2004 suggest that attainment levels at Key Stages 2 and 3 are less than half the city average, while the proportion of looked after children gaining five or more higher grade GCSEs is less than a quarter the city average.

Strategic approach to neighbourhood renewal and education

The basic approach taken by agencies has been to raise organisational effectiveness at the level of individual learners, at the level of separate institutions, at the level of networks of service providers, and across the learning infrastructure as a whole.

Neighbourhood renewal through education and learning thus takes place largely through the implementation of mainstream strategies. It is supported through a range of other interventions, including regeneration areas - such as Single Regeneration Budget supported activity in Handsworth and New Deal for Communities activity in Aston and Kings Norton – and specific short-term transformation budgets, such as Neighbourhood Learning in Disadvantaged Communities, and ESF co-financed developments on adult basic skills.

An Education and Regeneration Panel has recently been established to co-ordinate neighbourhood renewal activity with other regeneration activity and ensure work funded through short-term grants fits into the wider framework of strategies for improving educational attainment within the city.

These wider mainstream strategies include

- Providing good quality learning opportunities in early years. This is being done through the development of children's centres in disadvantaged areas that build on the city's Sure Start programme.
- Engaging parents and encouraging positive attitudes to learning by increasing provision in disadvantaged areas to provide family engagement and better access to support services. Parents are engaged through family learning programmes to counter the transmission of negative attitudes to learning across generations.
- Improving performance in schools through Primary and Key Stage 3 strategies that focus on under-performing schools and pupils. Structured menus of support are available to schools, and teachers are helped through professional development of teachers to work more effectively with particular groups or in specific localities.
- Improved assessment and tracking of pupils at risk, in order to target support. There is a focus on looked after children and re-connecting young people with school. Additional out-of-school support is provided to particular groups to increase their resilience to risks that interfere with learning. Learning mentors and personal advisors work to keep young people in learning and to raise aspirations. The city has developed a range of programmes to support children and young people from specific black and minority ethnic communities.
- Providing young people with alternative routes to success at Key Stage 4. Multi-agency collaboration is providing young people with choices of routes at secondary school or in other 14-19 settings. There are strong collaborative links between schools and further education colleges across the city.
- Encouraging positive attitudes to learning in local communities. The local area planning groups established by the Learning and Skills Council to

improve adult basic skills are helping adult learning organisations focus on communities which tend not to participate or succeed in education. Learning within communities is also supported through libraries and supplementary schools.

These arrangements build on a number of externally recognised strengths. The Council's support for schools has been acknowledged through formal inspection by OFSTED, while the LSC's development of local area mechanisms for developing adult and community learning have been described as a "national exemplar".

Use of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) makes a small contribution to mainstream activity to support improvements in educational attainment across the city. This section outlines current use of NRF to support educational attainment.

City-wide thematic spending

During 2004-05, NRF has been used to support the following programmes of work across the city.

- Support for specific pupils at risk of under-achievement. This has included a range of work with pupils at risk of truancy or dropping out of school, mainly focused on 13-16 year-olds. Young carers have also been supported to stay on track.
- Support to schools with large proportions of under-achieving pupils in the Northwest and East through staff training, pupil motivation sessions, additional learner support sessions, development of materials
- Outreach from libraries to provide study support for 12-16 year-olds living on disadvantaged outer city estates.
- Support to develop new forms of family learning in target wards, working with existing LSC programmes
- Development of adult skills provision in target areas through local area planning groups, improving the quality of local provision and the opportunities for people to access this provision
- Sponsoring research into effective practice in early years, primary and secondary settings. This has included work to improve teachers' competencies in race equalities.

All these activities are aimed to accelerate agreed wider strategies, providing clearer support for what works in which context, in a situation where the strategies that have taken the city a long way in raising levels of performance will increasingly need customised interventions in the future to match the varieties of providers and communities. This includes extending support to new target groups or developing new ways of working within the mainstream. The model is "joint commissioning of change" to ensure agreed mainstream approaches focus on those who have furthest to travel to meet the attainment levels required by today's society.

Locally-determined spending

The same framework has been used to advise wards on the local use of NRF to support education targets. Analysis of locally-determined projects shows an emphasis on support for early years activity, out-of-school support, in-school support, parent-link and partnership work and family learning.

These activities have involved a wide range of public, voluntary and community organisations. They have varied considerably in the scale of spending. While all support learning in its broadest sense, their impact on individual learners has been more difficult to quantify.

Priorities for 2005-06

For city-wide thematic spending, priorities are based on the principle of bringing additionality to all that partners are already doing.

1. Support for development work via collegiate activity that will:
 - link to English, Maths, Science and ICT achievements at KS3 and KS4
 - boost GCSE and Level 2 achievements at age 16
 - support Level 2 achievements at age 19

The focus will be particularly on schools where results are below or around floor target levels.

2. Positive Action for Young People work, via activities with the voluntary sector, Youth Offending Team and Youth Service, to build resilience and re-engagement of young people aged 10-16.

The focus will be on activities in areas with low KS2/KS3/GCSE results, and will try to link these activities to ways of improving educational achievement (i.e. more than simple 'diversionary' activities).

3. Work to strip out the learning from the variety of previous programmes around women and learning (given that education levels of female adults in families are a major determinant on children's early development). Feed these lessons into the Equal programme AGENDER (and on, as appropriate, into local area planning groups for adult and community learning and into the Equal Engage programme), as one strand of support for 'learning communities'.
4. Work, via local area planning groups, to establish a consistent learning infrastructure of adult basic skills learning to meet local aspirational floor targets. Work will focus on wards with furthest to travel to meet local targets.
5. Family learning development work to focus on building resilience in young people at each key stage.

6. Work, jointly with the Health Strand, to support learning around issues of obesity (targeting wards where this is a specific issue), to include work with governors and senior school managers.
7. Resources to trial actions emerging from current research on teacher competencies/underachieving groups.
8. Resources to trial actions emerging
9. from current research on what works with specific types of schools in particular contexts.
10. Research to disaggregate achievement data down to sub-ward levels and to assess the range of existing and potential interventions to raise standards in these very small neighbourhood localities.
11. Work to ensure that learning developments being embedded into regeneration programmes (via LSC uplift; NLDC; NRS; NDC; SRB; Regeneration Zones etc etc) are getting the best alignment with each other and with mainstream programmes.

Improved working with Districts (In Birmingham a district is an area of around 120,000 people)

Districts will have an enhanced role in determining priorities for locally-based NRF spending. To support local decision-making,

- Districts will have access to data on the performance of schools and pupils resident in wards.
- Districts will have access to information on local learning networks involving primary and secondary schools, adult and FE providers.
- District staff will be helped to develop their understanding of differential performance and barriers to learning, so that local NRF is used in a targeted manner and related to outcomes.
- There will a menu of relatively straightforward options for the use of neighbourhood renewal and other funding support to make short term impacts on learning.