

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools (focusing on improving attainment at Key Stage 2)



Prepared by a task group of the
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

March 2012

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1. FOREWORD

- 1.1. On behalf of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Task Group is pleased to present the review into effective challenge of underperformance (focussing on Key Stage 2), with its associated recommendations, for Medway Council's Cabinet to consider.
- 1.2 Medway's performance at Key Stage 2 places it amongst the lowest performing local authorities nationally and it is therefore a key priority for Medway to improve attainment of our children and young people at this Key Stage.
- 1.3 In addition to taking evidence from various officers and experts within Medway, the Task Group visited several schools both within and outside of Medway to learn about their experiences in improving Key Stage 2 attainment. These conversations and visits demonstrated some good examples of best practice, which the Task Group hope is shared amongst all of Medway's schools.
- 1.4 We hope the Cabinet will take note of the evidence set out in this document in support of the recommendations and would like to take this opportunity of thanking all participants in the review.



Councillor Royle (Task Group Chairman)



Councillor Gilry



Councillor Kemp



Councillor Smith



Councillor Tolhurst

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a responsibility to scrutinise services and policies relating to children and young people throughout Medway. The committee receives quarterly information on how the Council is performing against its priorities and targets relating to children and young people and also receives an annual report on provisional test and examination results. These reports have demonstrated for some years that results at Key Stage 2 in Medway are far below the national average and improvement is needed.

Medway's Cabinet, at its meeting on 5 July 2011, also identified 'strengthening school leadership' as an area for targeted action.

It was therefore agreed that the Committee would set up a task group to carry out some in-depth scrutiny work on effective challenge of underperformance in schools, with a focus on Key Stage 2.

The review was supported by: -

- Juliet Sevier, Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement
- Hilary Gerhard, Head of School Challenge and Improvement
- Hilary Sanders, School Challenge and Improvement Lead – Assessment and Performance
- Teri Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer

Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the review were as follows: -

- 1) To identify best practice examples of how to raise pupil attainment in schools;
- 2) To identify barriers to school improvement and how these can be overcome.

Conduct of work

Members of the Task Group initially received a briefing from officers involved in school improvement work. The group then took evidence from various sources within Medway as well as externally.

The group made a number of visits, both locally and outside of Medway. The group chose to visit some outstanding schools, some schools that were improving well and some schools that were consistently satisfactory and performing poorly in terms of pupil attainment at Key Stage 2. They also met with some experts to discuss the issues relating to Key Stage 2 and how performance could be improved. All the Task Group's meetings and visits are outlined in section 5 of this report.

A Diversity Impact Assessment on school improvement is attached at Appendix 1.

Outcomes of the review

The following summarises the main findings of the review under the two headings of the terms of reference agreed for the review:

To identify best practice examples of how to raise pupil attainment in schools

Strong leadership is essential

At all the schools the Task Group visited that had good results or an upward progress trend for pupil attainment, there was a strong and motivated leadership. The Headteachers and Governing Bodies in these schools were aspirational, motivated, ambitious and had a clear direction of travel for the school which included high expectations with a relentless drive to achieve them.

The Task Group therefore recommend: -

- *Leadership teams judged satisfactory or below should be supported to move to at least good, through effective local improvement partnerships and accessing, then embedding, national and local best practice.*
- *Leadership teams should focus on improving the quality of learning and raising aspirations for all pupils by improving the quality of teaching to consistently good or better.*
- *The outcomes of the Bromley, Bexley, Medway and Kent collaborative group should be used to embed sustained good leadership.*
- *Additional targeted funding should be used to commission specialist expertise to improve leadership and management where required.*

Expectations must be high – satisfactory is not acceptable

The Task Group found that the schools with Headteachers who are good leaders were relentless in striving with their teams to be a good or outstanding school. For them satisfactory was not good enough. Those Headteachers that met with the Task Group talked about tackling an ethos of low expectations, particularly for certain groups of children, such as those in receipt of free school meals, or those with English as an additional language. The Task Group saw from some of the visits it made that good schools can overcome the barriers to learning that some believe these children face. Much can be achieved when leadership teams have high expectations and ambitions for all the children in their school and are clear about how education should be delivered to ensure every child is able to achieve their full potential.

Such leadership teams ensured that teaching and learning was at a good or better level and that teaching staff were themselves inspired and motivated for their pupils to achieve the very best they can. Equally, teachers who were delivering satisfactory or worse lessons were supported to improve at pace with clear expectations, targets and deadlines with progress monitored carefully. Some examples of best practice in supporting teachers to improve are detailed within section 6 of the report.

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

The Task Group therefore recommend: -

- *A Medway Chartered Teacher Award, which acknowledges what great teachers do in Medway, should be explored to make a difference to children's learning and life chances.*
- *That guidance should be issued to schools on brokering external consultancy, which will have impact and be sustainable, including accredited professional development to meet the needs of groups of teachers thus improving quality of provision in schools.*

Governing Bodies need to ensure they carry out the role of challenge and holding to account effectively

The Task Group has concluded that Governing Bodies are not always effective in challenging their school's Headteacher and leadership team - one of the most important roles of a Governing Body. Governors need to understand the school's data fully to appreciate what is working well, what is needed to improve and they need to be asking these questions of their school's leadership team.

The Task Group learnt that some Governing Bodies were not gaining access to comprehensive data relating to their school, because they were not aware they could have the data and were entitled to it and/or because the information was not provided consistently by all Headteachers. This concerned the Task Group, who appreciated that detailed data about a school is essential for a Governing Body to set the strategic direction for the school and also to carry out its role in supporting and challenging its Headteacher and leadership team.

The Task Group considered the importance of all school governors committing to attend the training courses provided at induction and on an ongoing basis in order to develop the skills and information they need to provide effective challenge.

The Task Group therefore recommend: -

- *In partnership with Medway Governors Association, a minimum requirement for Governor training should be agreed so that some courses are compulsory for Governors to attend*
- *Medway Councillors should be encouraged to demonstrate effective practice in the skills and qualities required for good governance and put themselves forward to act as a local authority representative on at least one governing body, particularly at satisfactory schools or those of concern.*

Methods and quality of teaching

Of the schools visited, 50% were using specific synthetic phonics programmes to teach children literacy. Teaching children phonics enables them to recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes and identify sounds that different combinations of letters make and is internationally proven to improve reading. The Task Group was therefore keen for more of Medway schools to use such programmes.

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

The Task Group also learned about various interventions schools had undertaken to improve attainment, such as, teaching in smaller groups, 1:1 tuition, targeted home reading or mathematics practice and involving pupils in their own assessments and giving them personal targets so they are clear about what they need to do to achieve. At the various visits undertaken by the Task Group there were some great examples of best practice which are explained in more detail within section 6 of this report.

The Task Group therefore recommend: -

- *That all schools have a recommended synthetic phonics programme that all staff confidently apply, which accelerates pupil learning and progress so that they achieve well in both reading and writing.*
- *That best practice about effective interventions should be shared between schools including 1:1 tuition for pupils and target 1:1 funding on underachieving groups.*
- *That schools must embed best practice in assessment for learning so that all pupils know next steps in their learning and how to achieve them.*

To identify barriers to school improvement and how these can be overcome

Low expectations

The Task Group reached the view that it is critical for Medway's schools to systematically address key priorities from previous inspections and to raise their ambitions about what children and young people can and should achieve. Where the pace of change in schools is slow in response to Ofsted findings, the capacity to achieve improvement at the next Ofsted inspection is constrained. There are 24 primary phase schools with double satisfactory judgements in Medway. The Task Group was impressed by the progress made in successful schools they visited within and outside Medway, in areas of high deprivation or where there were a high number of pupils with English as an additional language. Despite this these schools were challenging themselves and were unprepared to accept a satisfactory Ofsted judgement as "good enough". The Task Group saw evidence that it is possible to have high expectations and a positive trajectory of improvement in schools serving the most challenging communities.

The Task Group also acknowledges and celebrates those schools that have maintained double good Ofsted judgements (been judged as 'good' at two consecutive Ofsted inspections) across a series of frameworks. There are 30 primary phase schools with double good judgements in Medway.

The Task Group therefore recommends that schools that have been judged satisfactory for two or more consecutive Ofsted inspections should: -

- *Invite a local authority adviser to be included in Deputy Headteacher, as well as Headteacher, appointments;*
- *Implement outcomes of leadership reviews commissioned by the Governing Body;*
- *Challenge and remove low expectations;*
- *Promote high aspiration for all pupils and engage effectively with parents;*
- *Use tracking data effectively so that all pupils make accelerated progress;*
- *Embed and sustain strategies and interventions, which are proved to impact on pupil progress.*

Relationships between Headteachers and Governing Bodies

The Task Group concluded that where a school is judged as satisfactory and/or attainment results are low, Governing Bodies must ask why, champion children and work with Headteachers and leadership teams to understand what can be done differently or better to urgently accelerate improved results and progress. The Task Group recognise the value of positive and productive relationships between Governors and Headteachers. However, it is essential that Governing Bodies offer accountability for outcomes for children and young people through robust challenge and evaluate improvement and impact so that they effectively hold schools to account.

Local authority support

In July 2010 the Council commissioned an independent and external review of school improvement services. This made a number of findings, which included: -

- Access to local authority (LA) improvement support was variable and many headteachers were uncertain about what was available or how to access it;
- The work of many individuals supporting school improvement was highly valued although the work of others was described as “inconsistent” or offering “mixed messages”.

The School Challenge and Improvement Team (SCIT) was set up in April 2011 after a restructure to address the findings of the independent review and in response to the Schools White Paper, published in November 2010 by the Government. Although there had been some variable practice as found in the above review, and the team are now providing consistent challenge, the new structure has left the team with little capacity to concentrate any of its efforts in schools other than those in an Ofsted category of concern or causing concern to the Local Authority. The team believe that significant, additional learning gains and benefits could be derived from local authority support by the schools in Medway that are rated as satisfactory (particularly those which have been judged satisfactory for two consecutive inspections) as these schools are fragile and at risk of decline.

The Task Group was delighted that the Cabinet proposed a £143,000 increase to the 2012/13 budget for Key Stage 2 improvements at its meeting on 14 February 2012, which was agreed by full Council on 23 February 2012. The Task Group has suggested that this funding be used for: -

- Commissioning specialist expertise to improve leadership and management;
- 1:1 pupil tuition to support current year six pupils to raise their attainment (to national expectations) at pace.

3. BACKGROUND

In October 2011 the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Task Group to undertake a review of effective challenge of underperformance in school, with a particular focus on Key Stage 2, which has been a stubborn statistic for Medway for a number of years.

Key Stage 2 is the legal term for the four years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales normally known as Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, when pupils are aged between 7 and 11.

The term is used to define the group of pupils who must follow the relevant programmes of study from the National Curriculum. All pupils in Key Stage 2 must follow a programme of education in at least the following areas:

English	Information and Communication Technology
Mathematics	Art and Design
Science	Music
History	Physical Education
Geography	Religious Education

At the end of Key Stage 2, when pupils are in Year 6 (eleven year olds), they are tested as part of the national programme of National Curriculum tests, known as SATs. These tests cover English and mathematics. The English level is calculated using the results of both reading and writing. The tests are externally marked, with results for each school being published in Department for Education (DfE) performance tables. It is the outcome of these tests in some of Medway's schools that has caused concern and resulted in this topic being prioritised for an indepth review by Overview and Scrutiny. The expected level for eleven year olds is level 4. Children who gain level 5 are working above the age expected level for the subject.

Progress between the age of 7 and 11 is measured as the difference between their national curriculum level at age 7, based on teacher assessment and their test result at the end of Key Stage 2. So, a child who leaves Key Stage 1 at level 2 and achieves level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2, has made 2 levels of progress, which is expected.

The following shows Key Stage 2 results for Medway for 2011 compared with national results:

	Percentage of pupils achieving (%)				
	Level 4+ English	Level 4+ mathematics	L4+ in both English & mathematics	2 levels of progress in English	2 levels of progress in mathematics
Medway	76	74	68	82	77
National	82	81	74	84	83
Local Authority Range of Results	74 – 91	69 – 90	62 – 87	68 - 92	61 - 90

Medway's performance at Key Stage 2 places it amongst the lowest performing local authorities nationally.

Effective challenge of underperformance in school

The following is an extract from the Council Plan Monitoring, Quarter 3, report that was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 14 February 2012.

“This quarter we have continued to support school governing bodies to recruit headteachers with a proven record of good leadership in schools, and raising standards in challenging schools. Four successful appointments have been made and there is evidence of this impact in Ofsted reports.

In addition, training has continued which focuses upon the roles and responsibilities of all leaders in schools. This has included the “Moving On Up” programme, which aims to improve leadership, teaching and learning and standards ratings from satisfactory to at least good. Leadership teams of schools in challenging circumstances have received direct support from their attached School Improvement & Challenge Lead, as well as support from sector led partnerships including Local Leaders of Education.

A second cohort of headteachers in Medway has been successfully completed training as Local Leaders of Education. A third cohort are applying for the Local Leaders of Education programme and will complete training and induction next quarter. The Headstart programme is in place for all headteachers new to headship in 2011/12. Medway held conferences in November for headteachers and governors, these focused on the new Ofsted framework which starts in January 2012. Attendance was good and evaluations positive.

Medway continues to work in partnership with Bexley, Bromley and Kent to develop leadership. Evaluations from the training held during the quarter were positive and the project continues.

Governor Services have continued to deliver a comprehensive programme of training and support, including regular training sessions for governors on their duties in relation to finance. These sessions are well attended and are repeated three times during the year for new governors. A more in-depth session on finance is offered twice yearly and is similarly well attended.

Progress towards improvement in challenging schools is monitored through regular Challenge and Progress Review Meetings chaired by the Assistant Director for Inclusion and School Improvement. As a result of all support, the number of schools below the floor target, based on provisional results, has reduced from 22 schools to 12”.

4. SETTING THE CONTEXT

(a) Legal framework, Council and school's duties and obligations, accountabilities and performance

The combined measure of achieving level 4 or above in both English and mathematics is a key national indicator for performance at the end of Key Stage 2 (11 year olds). The Government has set a floor threshold of 60% level 4 or above in both English and mathematics. Schools that do not reach the 60% measure and are not making national median (expected) progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in English (87%) and mathematics (86%) are deemed to be "below floor". The progress measure for each subject is the percentage of pupils making 2 levels of progress between the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (e.g. a child achieving level 2 at the end of Key Stage 1 needs to achieve level 4 or better by the end of Key Stage 2).

Ofsted also inspect schools and currently judge them on four grades: -

- Outstanding
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Inadequate.

The aim for all schools is to achieve good or better at Ofsted inspection. Schools who receive a satisfactory judgement are inspected more frequently than those that achieve good or outstanding. The criteria against which Ofsted judges schools are revised periodically with each framework raising expectations of performance against which the schools are judged.

There are four themes judged by OFSTED; pupil achievement, quality of teaching and learning; leadership and management and behaviour and safety. An overall effectiveness grade is given based on the outcomes of the four themes. The quality of teaching is assessed using lesson observations, looking at pupils' work and their progress over time. Leadership and management is assessed by evaluating action taken against the impact on pupil achievement and sustainability of systems. Pupil achievement is assessed on attainment and progress made over time and within lessons. Behaviour assessment includes behaviour in lessons and around the school, staying safe and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Ofsted considers the views of parents, pupils, staff and Governors as part of the inspection process through questionnaires and interviews. Ofsted reports are published on the Ofsted website and sent to all parents.

(b) Medway's policy framework

School Improvement Strategy 2011-14

School improvement work is consistent with the provisions in the Children and Young People's Plan and in accordance with the Medway School

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Improvement Strategy, 2011-14, which sets out 5 priorities, endorsed by headteachers, governors and the Local Authority (LA):

1. strengthening school leadership at all levels, with particular reference to schools where pupil outcomes are unsatisfactory;
2. promoting excellence in teaching;
3. supporting initiatives to raise pupils' attainment in basic skills in English and maths, with a particular emphasis on raising standards in reading;
4. setting out a robust strategy for early intervention that will increase children's readiness for school;
5. encouraging better transition arrangements across all phases.

Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14

The Children and Young People's Plan sets the following as a priority; to "raise the aspirations and expectations of all children, families, teachers; schools and communities in Medway".

The plan also states; "Key Stage 2 (children aged 7 to 11 years) results in Medway were very disappointing last year. The percentage of children achieving the expected level in 2010 was in the bottom quartile for English councils in all subjects, and did not meet ambitious targets set for the LA area. This is an area for priority action in the school improvement service".

Further more, it states; "there will be a strong emphasis on improving teaching and learning in all schools during the lifetime of this plan and the partnership has agreed that good performing schools are often better placed to advise and support poor performing schools on how to improve teaching and learning. The partnership will support and facilitate inter-school support and sharing of best practice examples amongst schools. The partnership will also provide some specific support on improving assessment, teaching and learning for individual children".

Council Plan 2012-13

A commitment within the Council Plan is: -

"we will champion strong leadership and high standards in schools so that all children can achieve their potential, and the gaps between the least advantaged and their peers are narrowed".

It also identifies measures of success and the following are those relevant to this review: -

- Ofsted school judgements showing a trend of improvement;
- Measures to track effectiveness of governing bodies and the support they receive to be considered;
- Difference made by LA support to schools causing concern (to be designed)
- Pupil absence and the time taken to secure appropriate places;
- Achievement at level 4 or above in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2;

(c) National and local picture

The National picture:

Medway is currently ranked 5th lowest for level 4+ attainment in both English and mathematics against other local authorities in England. The low rate of improvement in this measure will impact on Medway's capacity to meet the targets set for primary education outcomes in both the Council Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan both for Key Stage 2 and for Key Stage 4. Low performance at Key Stage 2 means that students start Key Stage 3 at a lower level than nationally expected and have to make accelerated progress to achieve the national measure for secondary pupils of 5 or more A* - C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics.

The Government, through its policy 'The Importance of Teaching: Schools White Paper: School Improvement', implemented through the Education Act 2011, has undertaken to: -

- Make clear that schools have responsibility for improvement. We will end the approach of trying to control improvement from the centre and make it easier for schools to learn from one another;
- Make sure that every school has access to the support it needs through National and Local Leaders of Education, Teaching Schools and leading teachers, or by working in partnership with a strong school;
- Encourage local authorities and schools to bring forward applications to the new Education Endowment Fund – funding for innovative projects to drive school improvement and to raise the attainment of deprived children in underperforming schools – and create a new collaboration incentive;
- Make sure that schools have access to evidence on best practice, high-quality materials and improvement services which they can choose to use;
- Support underperforming schools such as those below the new floor standards, and ensure that those which are seriously failing, or unable to improve their results, are transformed through conversion to Academy status.

The Medway picture:

In January 2012, Medway has 82 primary phase schools (plus three special schools with primary provision), these are broken down as: -

- 45 through primary schools – 20 are judged by Ofsted as good, 23 are satisfactory and two are in an Ofsted category of concern;
- 17 junior schools – 6 are judged as good, 9 are satisfactory and 2 are in an Ofsted category of concern;
- 20 infant schools – 17 are judged as good by Ofsted and 3 are satisfactory.

Analysis of the level 4 or above combined English and mathematics results for 2011, and a five year trend of attainment for this measure, shows: -

- 27 schools exceeded the national average of (74%)
- A further 7 schools were very close to the national average;
- 12 schools attained between 61 – 68% (Medway average for 2011);

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- 16 schools were below 60%, however, only 11 were below the floor target as five schools were above the median national progress measures in English and/or mathematics
- 24 primary phase schools are double satisfactory (judged satisfactory on their last two Ofsted inspections) – most of these have an inconsistent pattern of results and 4 are declining.

Therefore, Medway has a lower proportion of good or better primary schools than the national average, and more satisfactory schools, two thirds of which have been judged as satisfactory at their last two inspections and not improved to good. The majority of Medway schools that have been judged as good by Ofsted also achieve good progress and attainment by the end of Key Stage 2.

“Although the overall effectiveness of primary schools has improved since the last assessment, only just over half are good or better. This is much lower than in similar areas and the country overall. Standards achieved by 11-year-olds in national tests are much lower than elsewhere and have not improved over the last five years”.

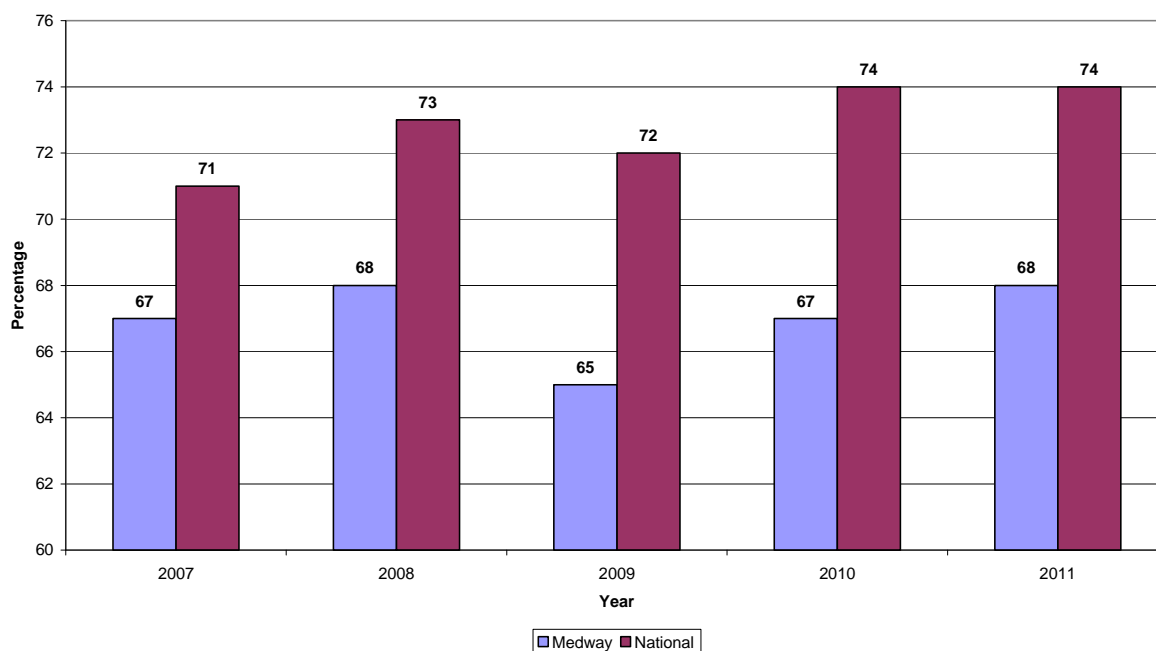
Ofsted’s Annual Performance Assessment of Medway’s Children’s Services 2011

		2007	2008	2009	2010	1 year improvement	4 year improvement
KS2	LA (%)	67.0	68.0	65.0	67.0	2.00	0.00
	NAT (%)	71.1	73.0	72.5	74.0	1.54	2.89

Medway’s performance profile, published by Ofsted in August 2011

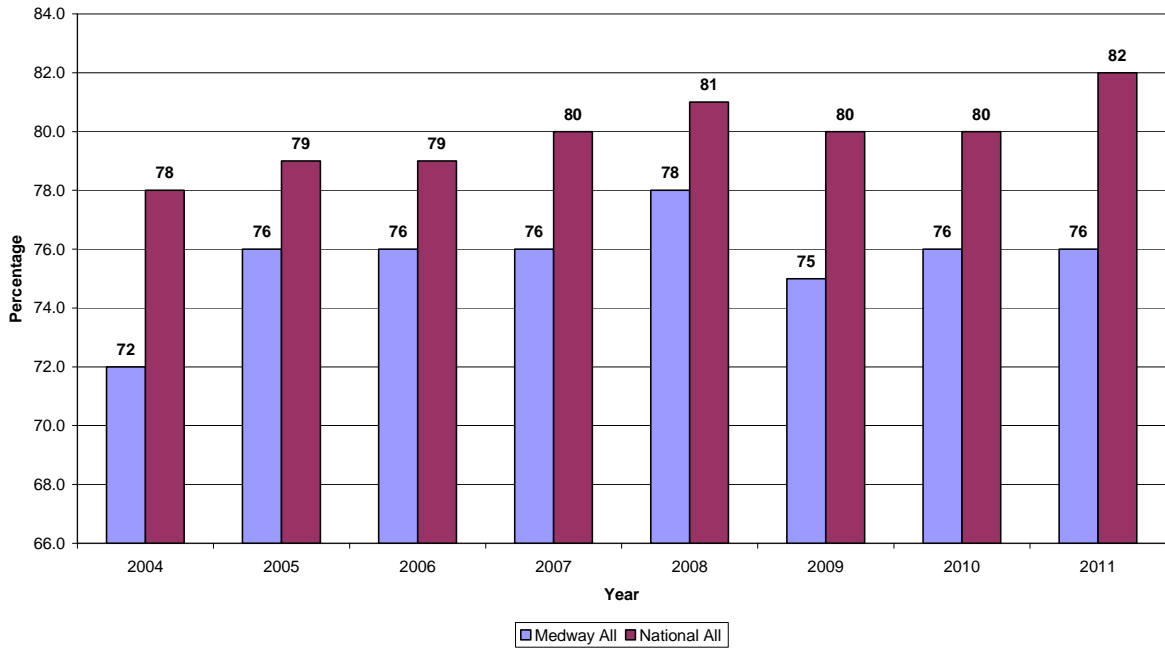
The most recent performance data trends:

KS2 2007 - 2011 Percentage of Pupils Achieving L4+ in Both English and Mathematics

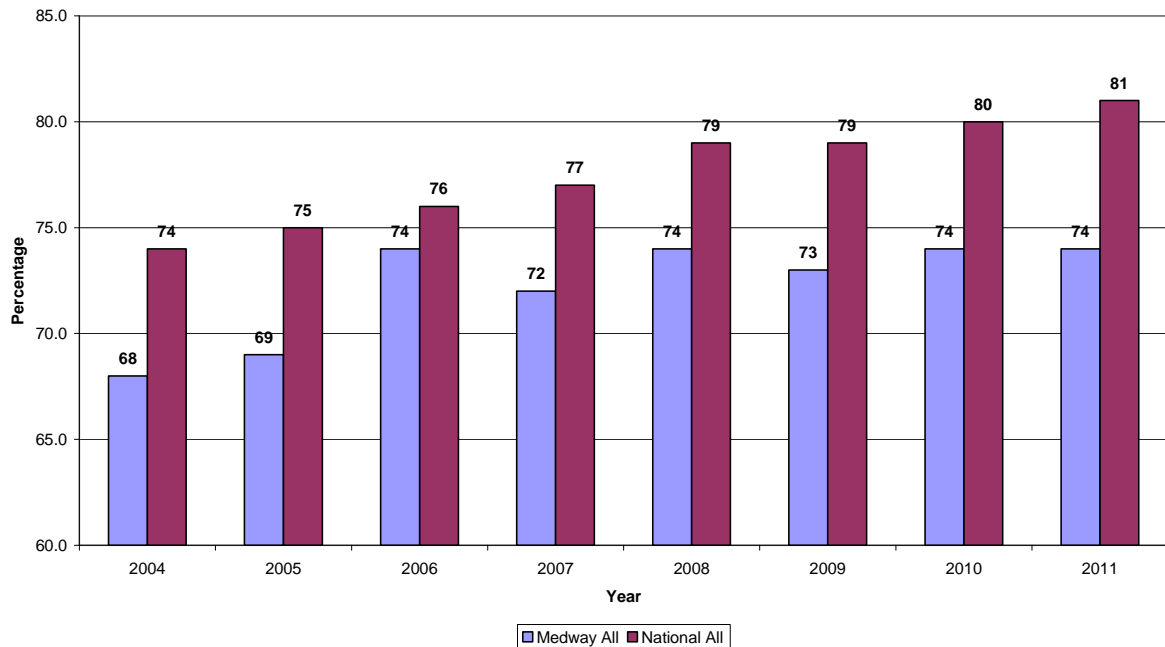


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KS2 2007 - 2011 Percentage of Pupils Achieving L4+ English



KS2 2007 - 2011 Percentage of Pupils Achieving L4+ Mathematics



5. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

At its first meeting the Task Group discussed the background to the topic of improving attainment at Key Stage 2 with the School Challenge and Improvement Team who provided information on what was already being done nationally and locally to help address under performance. The Task Group then set the scope of the review and agreed that it would initially visit various schools to understand their challenges and successes in working towards improvement in performance and attainment. The Task Group spent a number of months gathering evidence and information to build a picture of good practice and lessons learned. The table below shows the timeline of the work of the Group.

Date	Venue	Members in attendance	Other attendees	Purpose
8 Nov 2011	Gun Wharf, Chatham	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Juliet Sevier – Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement; Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team.	Initial meeting of the group to scope the review and set terms of reference.
24 Nov 2011	Brompton Westbrook Primary School	Councillors Kemp, Royle and Smith	Mrs Heyes – Headteacher	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.
25 Nov 2011	Frederick Bird Primary, Covertry	No Councillors attended	Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Hilary visited to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2 and fed back to the Task Group.
29 Nov 2011	St Michael's RC VC Primary School	Councillors Gilry and Kemp	Dominic McBride – Headteacher; Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.
1 Dec 2011	London Fields Primary School, Hackney	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Caroline Tyson – Head of School Hilary Gerhard – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.
7 Dec 2011	Allhallows Primary School, Medway	Councillors Gilry, Smith and Tolhurst	Sandi James – Headteacher M Wenban – Deputy Headteacher Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.

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19 Dec 2011	Gun Wharf, Chatham	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Juliet Sevier – Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Meeting to review findings of visits so far
05 Jan 2012	Oaklands Infant and Junior Schools	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Lloyd Murphy – Headteacher Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.
23 Jan 2012	Sir William Burrough Primary. Tower Hamlets	Councillors Gilry, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Avril Newman – Headteacher Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	Visit to hear about the school's experience of Key Stage 2.
31 Jan 2012	Gun Wharf, Chatham	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Andy Reese – Chair of 21 st Century Schools group Julia Clarke, Kevin Goad – Chairs of Medway Governing Bodies Juliet Sevier – Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	To gain evidence from the 21 st Century Schools Group and Chairs of Governors about their role and experiences in raising Key Stage 2 attainment.
09 Feb 2012	Gun Wharf, Chatham	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Barbara Padmore – Local Leader of Education Juliet Sevier – Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	To gain evidence from a local leader of education about her role and experiences in raising Key Stage 2 attainment.
20 Feb 2012	Gun Wharf, Chatham	Councillors Gilry, Kemp, Royle, Smith and Tolhurst	Rose Collinson – Director of Children and Adult Services Juliet Sevier – Assistant Director, Inclusion and Improvement Hilary Gerhard, Hilary Sanders – School Challenge and Improvement Team	To agree and finalise the task group's recommendations.

In addition to the work outlined above, the Task Group submitted questions to Medway's Citizen Panel in November 2011. The outcome of this is reported within section 6 of this report.

6. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED

The Task Group visited several schools and spoke with a range of experts to understand the issues around Key Stage 2 and what can help improvement and attainment. Below are the task group's key findings from these visits and discussions: -

Leadership and management

Governance

There are three key roles of a Governing Body: setting the strategic direction, ensuring accountability and providing challenge and support in a critical friend manner.

Governors should provide both challenge and support to Headteachers and leadership teams. To do this effectively Governors need the knowledge, expertise and experience to provide effective challenge, including a good understanding of school data against national performance.

The Task Group were delighted to learn that one of Medway's Chairs of Governors has recently become a National Leader of Governance and Members hope that other Governors in Medway can benefit and learn from the experience of this Governor.

The governing body is keen to support and challenge the school but its members do not get sufficient information at the right time to ask pertinent questions and the school does not always present information clearly. The school does not involve the governing body sufficiently in strategic planning.

Quote from a Medway school Ofsted report

When Governing Bodies are not rigorous in challenging underperformance and setting high expectations and are accepting of low performance they are not effectively fulfilling their duties in managing the performance of the Headteacher at the school.

Understanding data is key for Governors in order to fully monitor and evaluate their school's performance and challenge Headteachers and staff effectively. They should compare school data with national performance. They should also receive regular updates on the performance of pupils currently within the school and the impact of any actions taken to raise attainment. However, in speaking to Governors the Task Group was told that some were not being given access to the data they need and in some cases, where this information is made available, Governors do not understand their role in monitoring and evaluating the accuracy of the data received.

"it is essential to governor's mission and ambition to expect to ask and receive simple and clear explanations about how well their school is doing to close achievement gaps that prevent children and young people achieving the levels of academic success required to open up learning and life opportunities".

Quote from the Medway Governor newsletter – September 2011

When the Task Group met with two of Medway's Chairs of Governing Bodies, the chairs explained how important it is for new Governors to understand; the role, how much work is involved, how schools operate and how to carry out the role effectively. Training was offered but they commented that often it's the same Governors going to all the training.

Governors should be asking challenging questions, therefore, developing the capacity and skills to do this was an important part of governor training. Where training is offered to a whole Governing Body it has more impact than isolated Governors attending central training.

Ofsted's report on School Governance provides some key characteristics of effective governing bodies, which includes: -

- Relationships with school leaders is based on trust, openness and transparency;
- Systematically monitor school progress and consistently ask for more information, explanation and clarification;
- They are given high quality, accurate information with a focus on pupil achievement;
- Take and support hard decisions in the interests of pupils;
- Support honest and insightful self-evaluation;
- Clarity over roles and responsibilities of Headteacher and governors with protocols, specific duties and terms of reference in place and explicit;
- Governors routinely attend training;
- Ask challenging questions focused on improvement.

The Task Group asked about the consequences for Governors who fail to meet their obligations and/or attend Governing Body meetings regularly. Currently, where a Governor fails to attend governing body meetings, without the formal consent of the governing body, for a continuous period of six months, beginning with the date of the first meeting missing, they are disqualified.

Senior leaders

Of the schools visited, the Task Group found that those with good attainment and/or good progress had Headteachers who were motivated and strong leaders. They also generally benefitted from strong leadership teams who had high expectations, which had been clearly communicated to staff. They were aspirational and there were no excuses, both for academic success and behaviour. They were solutions led, always seeking to raise achievement for all pupils. They had the confidence to review best practice and initiatives and select only those that would benefit their school.

Headteachers at good schools visited by the Task Group recognised the explicit link between the effectiveness of robust leadership and the improvement of teaching and learning. One school had progressed from being in special measures to being judged an outstanding school within two and a half years. This was largely due to the ambition and strong leadership of a newly recruited Headteacher. In all cases there was a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching at individual level.

The Task Group found that leadership teams in good schools also had clear, shared values which every member of the school community was expected to endorse and put in to practice.

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

The Seven Ps Policy was shared with the Task Group at one of its school visits – it consisted of seven key principles staff were expected to adopt and put into practice: -

- *Purpose*
- *Positive teaching*
- *Partner work*
- *Participation*
- *Progress*
- *Passion*
- *Pace*

The Task Group found that good leadership teams acted promptly to address areas for development or improvement and made good use of best practice information. They were able to do this because the whole team worked together to monitor and evaluate strengths and weaknesses across the school and so were well informed when feeding information back to individual staff.

The Task Group found that some poorer performing schools had weaker leadership and less of a focus on prioritising the key issues. There were examples where Headteachers were spending too much time teaching and covering absences, rather than leading the school and monitoring performance. One Headteacher admitted the school had previously been trying to improve too many things at once, which resulted in little progress being made in any area. They had since prioritised areas for concern, one of which had been attainment at Key Stage 2, and demonstrable improvement had been achieved. The use of assessment in schools to track progress and inform teaching was also weak in some schools, which lead to low rates of progress. Some Governing Bodies appeared to have little knowledge of the attainment and progress of pupils and did not act to challenge underperformance.

Inadequate – Leadership and management

Despite remedying a few small areas of weakness, perhaps recently, improvements are fragile, too slow or depend on external support

The evaluation schedule for the inspection of maintained schools and academies

The Task Group also acknowledged that Governing Bodies needed to know and recognise what good and outstanding schools looked like. It was suggested that Governors access best practice via visiting outstanding schools (not necessarily within Medway), reading Ofsted guidance based on outstanding schools and reading inspection reports of outstanding schools. Park View Business and Enterprise School in Birmingham had recently been judged outstanding, achieving outstanding for each aspect of the Ofsted framework. This report can be viewed on the Ofsted website at the following link: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/103524>

Three out of four respondents of Medway's Citizen Panel recognised that leadership and quality of teaching were key elements in effective schools.

Monitoring and evaluation

Schools work in partnership with many different agencies. Schools group together in geographical areas to form consortia and these meet regularly to consider current issues

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

and share good practice. Schools also group together in other ways, for example, Executive Headteachers of federated schools meet regularly.

Robust planning, monitoring and evaluation by school leaders was demonstrated in the good schools visited. Leadership teams analysed a range of performance data, tracked pupil progress carefully and for every child, conducted frequent lesson observations and routinely carried out book scrutinies of pupils' work. They combined all this evidence to reach judgements about the strengths of their teachers and practices. This enabled them to successfully provide feedback to both staff and children that was constructive and developmental. The Task Group believes this is key to ensure consistency of aims and expectations. Working together to identify the gaps and problem solve embeds an ethos of continual improvement. In a number of the schools best practice in marking was adopted, using helpful and constructive comments, rather than marks out of ten. It was considered that this helped pupils understand better where they needed to focus to improve.

The Task Group could see that self-evaluation frameworks (SEFs) are an important tool for schools. They enable a school to reflect on its current status and journey of improvement. Schools can evidence the impact of their actions against national Ofsted criteria making judgements and planning next steps. Self-evaluation frameworks are key documents, which should be shared with and influenced by the Governing Body and used as a starting point to develop the School Improvement Plan. They should be revisited regularly to demonstrate the impact of the School Improvement Plan, for example, changing a grade judgement as a result of actions taken in the School Improvement Plan.

Self-evaluation frameworks are most successful when completed in an honest and transparent way, prioritising pupil achievement and teaching and learning. The Task Group felt that not all schools are successful in identifying key priorities and identifying and planning interventions to eradicate underperformance. Governors can act as critical friends asking questions about the self-evaluation framework and the Task Group considered that collaborative partnerships between schools were helpful in sharing information and carrying out joint observations, which can support robust judgements against Ofsted criteria. Best practice can also be shared through collaborative partnerships.

One of the witnesses the Task Group spoke to said it was frequently apparent that basic systems, practices and standards were missing in under-performing schools. It was stated that consortia were assessing what types of support were most effective and there was evidence that 1:1 pupil support was having a real impact.

"We never stop asking, "how can we do it better?" We ask this of everyone – staff, governors, parents and children".

Quote from one of the schools visited

The Task Group was interested to hear about the Sutton Trust which was founded in 1997 by Sir Peter Lampl with the aim of promoting social mobility through education. It has funded a wide range of access projects in early years, school and university settings, with a focus on research, policy and innovative practical projects with a system-wide relevance. The main objective of the Sutton Trust is to improve educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds and increase social

mobility. They have reviewed the interventions used in schools and assessed their value for money cost against impact on pupil progress. While costly 1:1 pupil support is shown to have impact. The Sutton Trust's Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning can be viewed using the following link: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/toolkit-of-strategies-to-improve-learning/>.

School Improvement

The Task Group found that schools making good and paced progress in attainment could demonstrate that they had prioritised issues and streamlined their efforts to focus on the most important priorities, for example, improving attainment at Key Stage 2 in literacy and numeracy. This then fed into a focus on quality of teaching and learning with individual schools taking a range of actions to set expectations and raise aspirations. These included: -

- Good quality School Improvement Plans, which contained SMART success criteria which demonstrated impact on the achievement of all groups of pupils: -
 - S - Specific
 - M - Measurable
 - A - Attainable (with some Aspirational!)
 - R - Relevant
 - T - Timely
- Subject Leader Plans which link directly to the School Improvement Plan;
- Regular robust monitoring and evaluation of the School Improvement Plan by both the leadership team and the Governing Body;
- Peer to peer coaching of staff;
- Teacher profiles and utilising them effectively;
- Accurate assessment which engages both the learner and the teacher in knowing next steps;
- Partnerships where best practice is shared and brokered;
- Attention to detail and immediate action taken to ensure a consistent approach;
- Development of learning environments and a whole school identity, for example, some of the schools the task group visited which were making paced progress had also put energy into providing a better learning environment for both pupils and staff by refurbishing the school buildings. The Headteachers felt that this had an impact on pupil progress.

Teaching and learning

Teacher recruitment and retention

The Task Group fully supports the priority of promoting excellence in teaching in the School Improvement Strategy and can see how important this is after visiting a range of schools.

In the better achieving schools, the Task Group found staff recruitment and retention to be relatively stable, with succession planning for promotion to middle and senior leadership in place. However, one school had an unusually much flatter management structure but benefited from a fluid leadership team where staff could co-opt themselves on and off at different times. The Task Group equally recognised that some change in staff was positive, bringing in new ideas and wider experience base.

The Task Group found that some Medway schools have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining teaching staff and that this can be attributable to location. For example, in the more rural areas of Medway or as a consequence of being so close to London, where salaries are markedly higher. Incentives such as travel allowances were in place but this was still a challenging issue.

Some of the schools visited had relatively new Headteachers in place who were working hard to drive forward improvement. Some of these Headteachers had found inconsistencies in teaching and in some cases inadequate teaching. In each case teachers had been extensively supported to improve the quality of lessons. There were examples of teachers being unable or willing to change and examples where teachers in this position had left the school.

The Task Group could see that recruitment of good quality teachers is absolutely key. One Headteacher spoke of a recent brave decision to re-advertise a teaching post and suffer the consequences of a prolonged vacancy rather than compromise and recruit from a weak field of applicants.

Another school with a more stable complement of staff spoke about how the staff problem solved together as a team – encouraging both motivation and loyalty as well as creating ownership for the staff, as well as the Headteacher, of issues and interventions. It also helped to develop the skills of the teachers in problem solving for their future careers.

Developing quality of teaching

The Task Group heard that Headteachers and senior leaders are key in developing good quality teaching within their school and witnessed various examples of how this can and was being done in the school visits that Members carried out, which included: -

- Setting clear and high expectations along with quick but realistic timescales to encourage paced improvement;
- Weekly learning walks by Headteacher with feedback via personal development meetings;
- Teachers were graded (via a red, amber, green (RAG) system) on different elements relating to teaching and learning which enabled specific targets to be identified for individual staff;
- Using pupil work and pupil conferencing along side observations of teaching to reach a judgement;
- One Headteacher believed in alerting staff straight away when something was not working and demonstrating there and then alternative ways of working, rather than leaving it to a later development meeting, thereby having greater impetus;
- One school had put in place a staff structure which operated teams of teachers per key stage with an extra teacher compared to the number of classes (i.e. 3 classes and 4 teachers) and one of the teachers lead the team. This enabled flexibility for smaller classes, as well as monitoring to ensure teaching was consistent throughout;
- Peer-to-peer coaching including the use of Advanced Skills Teachers;
- Headteachers would periodically drop in to classes in well performing schools – it was obvious that this was done frequently when both staff and students were un-phased as the Headteachers escorted Task Group members in and out of classrooms;

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

- Some of the schools had restructured their school day, making lunchtimes shorter enabling school to finish earlier on Fridays. This in turn provided space for teaching staff to meet and discuss what is working well, where problems are arising and to work together to find solutions;
- In well performing schools the Task Group could see that every minute mattered and teaching time was being maximised.

In schools where quality of teaching is generally satisfactory many of the above were missing or used as isolated activities rather than being embedded in the full working arrangements of the school. Leadership teams were slow to address weaker teaching and were too accepting of satisfactory teaching. There was a lack of impetus in pushing satisfactory to good or outstanding.

Curriculum provision for learning

Headteachers and Governors told the Task Group that delivering a full and rich curriculum is key for young children to achieve and aspire in their learning. There was a clear understanding from schools that were performing well or were making good progress from lower attainment that there needed to be a clear focus on the fundamental areas, i.e. children need a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy in order to be able to access the wider curriculum. Equally there was an expectation that both literacy and numeracy should be applied across the wider curriculum area. In outstanding schools English and mathematics were applied in all subjects. For example, when the Task Group visited one school it was during art week. However, there were several examples as the Members visited different classes, of where literacy and numeracy were being incorporated into the art work.

On one of the school visits the Task Group noticed the wide and rich vocabulary used by one of the teachers, which the children were clearly responding well to. In this school it was felt that using wide vocabulary raised aspirations of pupils.

If children leave primary school with 7000 words they are 20% more likely to be successful than if they leave with 3000 words

Quote from a teacher at one of the schools visited

Core subjects English and mathematics

Of the schools visited, 50% were using specific synthetic phonics programmes to teach children literacy and these had proven to work very well and had enabled paced progress and a rise in attainment, with one school's attainment rising by 24% (level 4+ in both English and mathematics from 2010-2011). Teaching children phonics enables them to recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes and identify sounds that different combinations of letters make. Children can then use this knowledge to 'de-code' new words as they see them. The sound method has been internationally proven to improve reading, especially among younger children. Some of the schools visited used specific programmes such as, 'Read, Write, Inc' and 'Jolly Phonics'. They appeared to work well according to attainment scores and from accounts made by Headteachers and staff at the school visits and all staff were consistent in their teaching when using the scheme. One school had leaders for the programme that carried out learning walks 3-4 times a week to ensure a consistent approach and delivery. They

were also expecting children to apply the phonics skills in both their reading and writing. It is the consistent application of the skills, which moves their English forward.

The Task Group was concerned by recent reports in the press that Medway was listed as one of the authorities whose schools had been the lowest in take up of a government initiative relating to these phonics programmes. The Government launched a phonics scheme in September 2011, offering to help schools pay for the products and training through match-funding. It was reported that in Medway, 6% of schools, (4 out of 67 schools), had so far signed up to the scheme. However, the Task Group noted that some schools have not yet claimed their funding although consistent synthetic phonics programmes are being delivered.

The Task Group is of the view that having a good phonics programme in place to teach children literacy is key in making some paced progress to improve children's attainment rapidly and want to encourage more schools in Medway to take up the match-funding opportunity and buy such programmes in.

The Task Group saw other software in use too. One school visited used English and mathematics programmes, which provided problems that were personalised for each pupil and were therefore pitched at just the right level to embed learning and challenge for each child. Teachers would first teach the concept to the whole class making assessments throughout the teaching. The worksheets were then given out. All pupils were engaged in completing their personalised problems and the teaching staff were able to support individual pupils in correcting misconceptions in learning and moving forward. Mixed ability grouping was used and adults moved around the classroom to support all learners.

The Task Group saw this demonstrated in a mathematics lesson. When pupils had completed their worksheet they input their answers into a handheld device, which in turn provided a sheet to show them which answers were correct and incorrect. They would then re-do the ones that were incorrect and once they had answered all the questions successfully they would move on to a secondary sheet which was also personalised for that child but at a slightly harder level than the previous worksheet. The system evaluates each pupil's performance every day so that the following day each pupil is given something slightly easier or harder, depending on the assessment of the pupil's work. The teacher was able to adjust the worksheets accordingly so there was flexibility and this was encouraged. It was felt the system was there to be used but not relied on. The Task Group was impressed by the system, considering it to be an effective tool enabling school leaders to look across the school to see exactly what level each pupil was performing at on any given day. All children were meeting age appropriate expectations in mathematics.

In addition, the Task Group also witnessed in the majority of the good schools they visited that literacy and mathematics were taught simultaneously school wide, which enabled subject leaders to walk around and ensure consistent approaches and effective delivery of subjects.

Several schools adopt whole-school approaches to developing the subject expertise of teachers and teaching assistants. This supports effective planning, teaching and intervention.

Ofsted's report on good practice of mathematics in primary schools

The other key message was that practice makes perfect – good schools were giving children plenty of opportunity to practice, both at school and through their homework, particularly with practicing reading and the mathematics times table.

It is of fundamental importance to ensure that children have the best possible grounding in mathematics during their primary years. Number, or arithmetic, is a key component of this. Public perceptions of arithmetic often relate to the ability to calculate quickly and accurately – to add, subtract, multiply and divide, both mentally and using traditional written methods. But arithmetic taught well gives children so much more than this. Understanding about number, its structures and relationships, underpins progression from counting in nursery rhymes to calculating with and reasoning about numbers of all sizes, to working with measures, and establishing the foundations for algebraic thinking. These grow into the skills so valued by the world of industry and higher education, and are the best starting points for equipping children for their future lives.

Ofsted's report on good practice of mathematics in primary schools

Pupil achievement and progress

In the schools with high attainment and/or progress, systems to track the progress of pupils individually and to evaluate the impact of interventions and initiatives were in place and well used. Assessments were accurate and systems to moderate judgements were strong and embedded. There were various ways of tracking pupils, not just through RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through school Self-Evaluation). Examples included: -

- One school assessed pupils every six weeks and placed them in the group according to their attainment, so teaching was being pitched at the right level and equally the pupils remained motivated – the year groups were made up of smaller classes due to an extra teacher being employed, to help raise standards quickly by teaching children in smaller groups according to ability;
- Another school provided pupils with assessment logs in their books, which enabled pupils to continually track their own progress and be clear how to reach their targets. The logs also enabled children to set a target of their own – one child had set as one of her targets to try to be less easily distracted;
- One school used the personalised English and mathematics programmes referred to above to monitor pupil progress;
- Another school identified some pupils as 'focus children' – not children with special educational needs but those who were not performing or progressing as they should – with red dots on their books so they were easily identified by staff for monitoring purposes and teachers had to demonstrate what extra interventions they were putting in place for these children.

In all the above examples schools took immediate action to intervene and monitor the impact of interventions on individual pupils. There was a continuous culture of high expectations. Reasons for lack of progress were identified and addressed. For example, where slow progress was due to poor marking and feedback, coaching was put in place for members of staff to improve these skills. Follow up to check and celebrate impact of improved marking and feedback on pupil progress and attainment was given.

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

In good and outstanding schools leaders were aware of the potential vulnerability of some groups of pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, they maintained high expectations and aspirations for all pupils, which they successfully translated into improved outcomes for them.

They also actively engaged with parents, for example: -

- Breakfast and lunch clubs for parents and children;
- Family learning included with these clubs;
- Workshops for parents on key skills;
- Parents invited to award celebrations for pupils;
- Effective communication with parents through electronic and written means;
- Inviting parents to pupil progress review meetings;
- Adult literacy classes;
- Home to school workers.

Respondents of the Medway Citizen Panel felt that schools needed to communicate effectively with parents about their child's learning.

As with health inequalities, reducing educational inequalities involves understanding the interaction between social determinants of educational outcomes, including family background, neighbourhood and relationships with peers, as well as what goes on in schools. Indeed, evidence on the most important factors influencing educational attainment suggests that it is families, rather than schools, that have the most influence. Closer links between schools, the family and the local community are needed.

Fair society, healthy lives – strategic review of health inequalities in England post 2010

The Task Group felt that where schools perceived aspirations of pupils and parents to be low there was less evidence of this provision and the leadership team endorsed rather than challenged staff perceptions of parents and pupils.

Strategic improvement partnerships

The Task Group recognised that improvement partnership working is key to success in terms of learning how to do things better, sharing ideas, using resources efficiently and supporting schools that need that extra help.

The Task Group heard about examples of excellent partnership working in Medway. Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) are existing Headteachers of good or better schools who work with other schools to help them improve. Currently Medway has 14 LLEs and National Leaders of Education (NLEs) who work with local schools. They support their partner school to improve key aspects of leadership and management and teaching and learning. The Task Group were also pleased to learn Medway had gained a National Leader of Governance.

There is also the Bromley, Bexley, Medway and Kent Collaborative Group who are developing succession planning projects for leaders during 2011/12. This group is funded by a successful bid to the National College by the four authorities. Local schools also form part of the group.

During its discussions with various experts the Task Group learned about these current partnership arrangements, as well as proposals of the 21st Century Schools Group to group schools in Medway into smaller groups. This was based on a model tried and tested in Greenwich which had demonstrated improvements among a number of its schools. The 21st Century Schools Group felt that the smaller groupings would enable more effective improvement partnership working, as individual schools will engage.

Some of Medway's school consortia (geographical groups of schools) are much bigger, with as many as 21 schools in the group. The Task Group felt these might be less effective, particularly for the schools that needed to benefit from the partnership working the most. In larger groups there is more scope for schools to opt in and out of meetings and initiatives. It was felt that smaller groups of schools would be more beneficial in building stronger and more trusting relationships between the schools within the consortia and thereby the support and challenge that schools can offer each other would be likely to be much more effective.

One of the schools visited stated it was keen to work with other schools more closely to benefit from partnership working and sharing of ideas. Other witnesses spoke about their positive experiences of partnership working with other schools. One witness spoke about how constructive it is to pair up a Headteacher with others who have undergone similar experiences. It was felt that working with another trusted Headteacher who would be able to provide constructive challenge, test judgements and provide feedback was a powerful model and should be encouraged further.

One school was part of a formal federation with three or four other schools. It had an overall Executive Headteacher with a Head of School based in each school. All schools within the federation followed the same policies, practices and procedures. The Headteacher considered this approach to have provided a richer resource for the school to draw from and had helped to speed up improvement and progress at the school. It also helped in terms of retention of staff as development opportunities were across the federation and not just within the school. The Task Group was also told that it enabled the sharing of ideas and best practice, along with shared problem solving and support.

The role of the Local Authority

The Local Authority is required to challenge underperformance and champion the needs of children.

Schools used to be required to have a School Improvement Partner. The core role of School Improvement Partners was to:-

- support and challenge schools' own evaluations, priority setting and planning;
- focus on progress and attainment;
- be the link between schools, local authorities and central Government.

However, in 2011, the Government lifted the duty on schools to have a School Improvement Plan and allowed local authorities to sell school improvement services in a wider market alongside other providers.

The School Challenge and Improvement Team was formed in April 2011 following a review to maximise reach and find efficiencies. The team is now much smaller and is concentrating its focus on Medway's most vulnerable schools and groups, i.e. those in an Ofsted category of concern and those below floor. In addition, members of the team

carry responsibility for assessment moderation; leadership; partnership and vulnerable groups such as looked after children, children with special educational needs, and underachieving groups of children. The team also provide centrally organised training and support for current priorities, for example, preparing for the new Ofsted inspection framework and a comprehensive package of training aimed at moving satisfactory schools to good.

The impact of the work of the new team can be evidenced by the reduction in the number of schools below the floor threshold from 18 in 2010 to 11 in 2011. This shows the focus of support has had some impact.

Some of the people who met with the Task Group expressed regret that capacity in the revised structure of Medway's School Challenge and Improvement Team had been reduced to an extent where the degree of support and training available to schools generally was now very limited. The Task Group heard from one Headteacher of a successful school who emphasised how hard the job is and that staff were feeling under particular pressure at the moment, coping with the current pace of change including the new Ofsted regime and uncertainties generated by the national drive for all schools to become Academies. It was reported that all Headteachers need to feel inspired and valued and have access to quality support, particularly those who are new in post in an under-performing school. The Task Group heard that in other Local Authority areas (eg Hertfordshire and some London Boroughs) School Improvement staff facilitate access for teachers to research material, resources and best practice examples, such as Audit grids designed to assist schools to undertake self-evaluation and achieve improvement.

Medway has shared best practice with schools and offers support and training for schools and Governors. Training resources are published on the local forum website together with a list of available training provision. However, given the limited capacity of the team some events are by invitation only and limited to Medway's most challenged schools. It is no longer possible to offer three or four repeated sessions of a course. It was therefore suggested that the option of buying in to the resources or expertise of other providers should be explored.

There is currently a noticeable pace of change in education. The Task Group heard that resistance to change and low expectations continue to feature in some Medway schools and it is the job of the Local Authority, governing bodies and Headteachers to challenge this and set clear expectations, performance standards and to use capability procedures where necessary. The Local Authority analyses the end of Key Stage 2 results as soon as they are available and writes to schools during the summer outlining celebrations and concerns. The Task Group learned that schools of serious concern attend challenge progress and review meetings where they are held to account for impact and pace of improvement required. The Headteacher and the Chair of Governors are required to attend as a minimum to these meetings. Support is also offered directly to these schools by the School Challenge and Improvement Team. Where necessary the local authority will use its statutory powers to remove governance and implement change if it is not occurring or is too slow.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership and management

Governance

Governance is a key aspect of leadership. The Task Group wishes to highlight the need to strengthen the quality and challenge provided by governance in a number of schools to maximise pupil progress and outcomes. Specific development areas to target include: -

- Governor involvement in safe, quality recruitment at all levels (school leaders and teachers)
- Governor use of data, finance and planning priorities to know their school;
- Governor monitoring and challenge role.

Recommendation 1:

In partnership with Medway Governors Association, a minimum requirement for Governor training should be agreed so that some courses are compulsory for Governors to attend, either as part of their induction and ongoing development or as a consequence of particular roles and responsibilities.

The Task Group noted the relatively small number of Medway schools with a Medway Councillor appointed to their governing bodies. The Task Group believe more Councillors should be encouraged to consider serving as School Governors.

Recommendation 2:

Medway Councillors should be encouraged to demonstrate effective practice in the skills and qualities required for good governance and put themselves forward to act as a local authority representative on at least one governing body, particularly at schools judged to be satisfactory or those of concern.

Senior leaders

The Task Group are aware that Medway has more satisfactory than good or outstanding leaders as judged by Ofsted. There is an urgent need to strengthen the leadership in some schools and build capacity for succession planning. The Task Group recognised the local authority both supports and challenges leadership and carries out risk assessments on all schools. Success is measured through pupil achievement trends and eradication of previous variable performance and Ofsted judgements.

Effective challenge of underperformance in schools

The Task Group Members were keen for all schools to know what outstanding practice looked like and about the journey to achieve that grade. The Task Group itself had witnessed this at a number of the visits it made both within and outside of Medway. There were a number of different models and examples, which demonstrated ways of overcoming barriers to success. It would encourage Medway leaders to access outstanding practice nationally as part of their reflection before deciding next steps for their school. It expects all schools to make use of best practice survey reports by Ofsted and other agencies.

The Task Group learned about improvement partnerships between schools in Medway. Members were impressed by the impact that moving to small focused improvement groups had made elsewhere and suggest that Medway accelerates progress towards this model.

Recommendation 3:

Leadership teams judged to be satisfactory or below should be supported to move to at least good, through effective local improvement partnerships and accessing, then embedding, national and local best practice.

Recommendation 4:

Leadership teams should focus on improving the quality of learning and raising aspirations for all pupils by improving the quality of teaching to consistently good or better. This will translate into Medway pupils making good progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 in both English and mathematics, i.e. above the national median of 87% English and 86% mathematics.

Medway is working in partnership with Bromley, Bexley and Kent supported by National College funding to develop succession planning for leadership at all levels. This project is now underway and will report in July 2012.

Recommendation 5:

The outcomes of the Bromley, Bexley, Medway and Kent collaborative group should be used to embed sustained good leadership.

The Task Group learned from its visits how important strong leadership and management was for a school to be successful and felt that there were a greater than average number of schools in Medway where support was needed to improve leadership and management.

The Cabinet identified additional school improvement funding of £143,000 in the budget setting process to accelerate improvements at Key Stage 2. The Task Group suggests that one aspect for this funding should be to commission specialist expertise to improve leadership and management.

Recommendation 6:

Additional targeted funding should be used to commission specialist expertise to improve leadership and management.

Impact on pupil progress

Currently too much teaching in Medway is not at a consistently good level. The responsibility for addressing this lies with the school leadership team (see recommendation 4 above). The Task Group believe more could be done to develop and recognise good teachers and set a minimum expectation of good.

Recommendation 7:

That a Medway Chartered Teacher Award, that acknowledges what great teachers do in Medway, should be explored to make a difference to children's learning and life chances.

Recommendation 8:

That guidance should be issued to schools on brokering external consultancy which will have impact and be sustainable, including accredited professional development to meet the needs of groups of teachers thus improving quality of provision in schools.

The Task Group saw demonstrated at a number of its visits the impact of teaching children with specific synthetic phonics programmes, which is a sound method that is internationally proven to improve reading, especially among younger children. The Task Group were keen for all of Medway schools to use such programmes, especially as there was match-funding to buy in these schemes available from the Government.

Recommendation 9:

That all schools have a recommended synthetic phonics programme that all staff confidently apply, which accelerates pupil learning and progress so that they achieve well in both reading and writing.

In addition, the Task Group would suggest that part of the additional £143,000 funding is also used for targeted 1:1 tuition to support current year six pupils to raise their attainment at pace.

Recommendation 10:

That best practice about effective interventions should be shared between schools including 1:1 tuition for pupils and target 1:1 funding on underachieving groups.

The Task Group saw some good practice in assessments for learning which enabled pupils to understand what their targets were to progress and achieve. Some pupils were even able to set targets for themselves. It was felt these practices should be shared and embedded across all of Medway's schools.

Recommendation 11:

That schools must embed best practice in assessment for learning so that all pupils know next steps in their learning and how to achieve them.

Satisfactory to good or better

Recommendations 1 – 11 are relevant for all schools in Medway and should be adopted by all Governors, Headteachers and Senior Leaders. However, the Task Group was keen to focus some additional attention to double satisfactory schools. Currently too many of Medway's schools are satisfactory and not improving. 24 primary phase schools in Medway are double satisfactory, i.e. they have been judged satisfactory in their last two consecutive Ofsted inspections. The Task Group felt that these schools required some additional assistance, which is reflected in recommendation 12 below.

Recommendation 12:

Schools that have been judged satisfactory for two or more consecutive Ofsted inspections should: -

- **Invite a local authority adviser to be included in Deputy Headteacher, as well as Headteacher, appointments;**
- **Implement outcomes of leadership reviews commissioned by the Governing Body;**
- **Challenge and remove low expectations;**
- **Promote high aspiration for all pupils and engage effectively with parents;**
- **Use tracking data effectively so that all pupils make accelerated progress;**
- **Embed and sustain strategies and interventions, which are proved to impact on pupil progress.**

8. REFERENCES

Medway Children and Young People's Plan 2011 – 14

Medway Council Plan Monitoring report, Cabinet – 14 February 2012

Medway Council Plan 2012 – 13

Medway School Improvement Strategy 2011 – 14

Ofsted – Good practice in primary mathematics: evidence from 20 successful schools

Ofsted - The draft evaluation schedule for the inspection of maintained schools and academies

Ofsted – School Governance, learning from the best

Ofsted – Developing Leadership: National Support Schools – strategies used to develop leadership potential and effectiveness in schools

Sutton Trust – Toolkit of strategies to improve learning

UCL institute of health equity - Fair society, healthy lives – The Marmot Review

Diversity Impact Assessment: Screening Form

Directorate	Name of Function or Policy or Major Service Change		
Children and Adult Services	Raising attainment at Key Stage 2		
Officer responsible for assessment	Date of assessment	New or existing?	
Juliet Sevier, Hilary Gerhard and Teri Reynolds	February 2012	New	
Defining what is being assessed			
1. Briefly describe the purpose and objectives	The Overview and Scrutiny Group Task Group were asked to undertake a review of performance at key stage two and were supported by officers from the School Challenge and Improvement team who work with schools to raise achievement for all pupils and to close the gaps in attainment between different pupil groups.		
2. Who is intended to benefit, and in what way?	Children and Young People should have the best start in life Improving the performance of Schools through challenge and support Medway council in terms of working to improve attainment at key stage 2 within new budget.		
3. What outcomes are wanted?	(1) Improved school performance (2) Raising the attainment of children and young people at key stage 2		
4. What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes?	Contribute	Detract	
	Efficient, effective and timely improvement measures to raise attainment		
5. Who are the main stakeholders?	(1) Children and young people in Medway (2) Schools, head teachers and teachers (3) School governors (4) Parents (5) Medway Council		
6. Who implements this and who is responsible?	Director of Children and Adult Services		

Assessing impact		
7. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>racial/ethnic groups</i>?		School improvement measures should be able to respond to schools' needs in this area. The council will make its best endeavours to support learners who are disadvantaged through a focus on narrowing the gap.
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?		<p>The recommendations relate to measures that are hoped to improve attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils. There is no evidence that the recommendations of the review will have a differential impact on different racial/ethnic groups. Funding to support ethnic minority achievement is within the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2012/13. Given that this resource will be channelled to schools plus the LA will still have its own Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) there is no reason to believe that ethnic minority groups would be especially or adversely affected. The LA's EMAG will be targeted at challenge and support of schools where there is evidence such as KS2 and 4 results which show that these pupils are under achieving.</p> <p>No issues relating to race have been highlighted by Ofsted inspections.</p>
8. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>disability</i>?		Brief statement of main issue
	NO	The recommendations relate the measures that are hoped to improve attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils. There is no evidence that the recommendations of the review will have a differential impact on disabled pupils. Funding to support children with special education needs, including disability, is within the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2012/13.
What evidence exists for this?		Special schools and resourced provisions in mainstream schools receive support from school improvement staff. Schools will be able to purchase support from the commissioning and traded services unit and specialist support can be commissioned. The recommendations are applicable to all schools providing Key Stage 2 education, including special schools.
9. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>gender</i>?		The recommendations relate to measures that are hoped to improve attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils, both girls and boys. The main gender issues in school improvement at the present time in Medway is the under-achievement of white working class boys in English and low attainment in mathematics for girls.
	NO	

What evidence exists for this?	The school improvement service serves the interests of all pupils through its work with schools. Boys' performance is below that of girls in literacy. This mirrors regional and national trends in gender differences in school attainment. However, gender gap was not one of the key issues highlighted from the review findings that relate to underperformance. A significant proportion of girls achieve level 4 or better in English but do not achieve level 4 in mathematics.	
10. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>sexual orientation</i>?		Brief statement of main issue
	NO	The recommendations relate to measures that are hoped to improve attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils. Sexual orientation is more likely to present as an in-school social/emotional issue rather than a school improvement issue
What evidence exists for this?	There is no evidence to suggest that the recommendations will have a differential impact on pupils due to their sexual orientation. The recommendations are hoped to improve attainment for all pupils at Key Stage 2.	
11. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a have a differential impact due to <i>religion or belief</i>?		Brief statement of main issue
	NO	The recommendations relate to measures that are aimed at improving attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils, of any religion. The current school improvement service commissions advisory support for religious education when it is needed.
What evidence exists for this?	There is no evidence to suggest that the recommendations will have a differential impact on pupils of different religion or belief.	
12. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to people's <i>age</i>?		Brief statement of main issue
	NO	The recommendations are aimed at supporting all children at Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) to be high achievers.
What evidence exists for this?	The recommendations will not impact adversely on age because school improvement challenge and support will continue to be provided for schools in all phases providing Key Stage 2 education.	
13. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>being trans-gendered or transsexual</i>?		Brief statement of main issue
	NO	The recommendations relate to measures that are aimed at improving attainment at Key Stage 2 for all pupils. Where they exist, transgender or transsexual issues are more likely to present as an in-school social/emotional issue rather than a school improvement issue.

What evidence exists for this?	There is no evidence to suggest that the recommendations will have a differential impact on pupils being transgender or transsexual. The recommendations are hoped to improve attainment for all pupils at Key Stage 2.	
14. Are there any <i>other</i> groups that would find it difficult to access/make use of the function (e.g. speakers of other languages; people with caring responsibilities or dependants; those with an offending past; or people living in rural areas)?		If yes, which group(s)?
	NO	It is not anticipated that the recommendations aimed at raising Key Stage 2 attainment will have a differential impact on any particular groups.
What evidence exists for this?	The recommendations support schools to improve Key Stage 2 attainment for all pupils in all of Medway's schools. It is ensured that looked after children (LAC) are appropriately supported so that they are not disadvantaged and that the council undertakes its very important responsibilities as corporate parent. Medway does benefit from a Virtual Head teacher to have oversight of, and to champion, the educational provision for LAC, which enables the council to challenge and support schools in which LAC are pupils to ensure they have high aspirations and high expectations of their LAC.	
15. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a have a differential impact due to <i>multiple discriminations</i> (e.g. disability <u>and</u> age)?		Multiple discriminations such as disability and age are not generally issues which are at risk in the delivery and implementation of measures to improve Key Stage 2 attainment
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	The recommendations are hoped to improve attainment for all pupils at Key Stage 2 and members of the school challenge and improvement team are professionals who are proficient at being flexible in meeting the needs of clients to ensure equity of provision.	
Conclusions & recommendation		
16. Could the differential impacts identified in questions 7-15 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact?	NO	One of the biggest challenges in Medway in terms of diversity and equalities is the gap in achievement between the most disadvantaged and their peers. The recommendations include challenging and supporting schools to reduce the gap in achievement between these children and young people, by sharing good practice, benchmarking with schools which have similar intakes but achieve better results with a narrowed gap, developing teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners and those with a range of learning abilities.

17. Can the adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group? Or another reason?	YES	There is no evidence of adverse impact in this respect but there is recognition that it is the least advantaged children and young people who suffer most when a school under-performs. The recommendations focus on working with the schools with the greatest needs in terms of improving school leadership and improving teaching and learning.
	NO	
Recommendation to proceed to a full impact assessment?		
NO	<p>This function/ policy/ service change complies with the requirements of the legislation and there is evidence to show this is the case.</p> <p>The review's recommendations are designed to improve Key Stage 2 attainment amongst all of Medway's children with particular focus on schools with lower Key Stage 2 attainment in Medway.</p>	
		Minor modifications necessary (e.g. change of 'he' to 'he or she', re-analysis of way routine statistics are reported)

Action plan to make Minor modifications		
Outcome	Actions (with date of completion)	Officer responsible

Planning ahead: Reminders for the next review		
Date of next review	No further review planned	
Areas to check at next review (e.g. new census information, new legislation due)	N/a	
Is there <i>another</i> group (e.g. new communities) that is relevant and ought to be considered next time?	No	
Signed (completing officer/service manager)	Date	
Signed (service manager/Assistant Director)	Date	

NB: Remember to list the evidence (i.e. documents and data sources) used