



Raising Attainment at Key Stage Two



February 2005
Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Foreword

In identifying Key Stage 2 attainment as a key priority for education overview and scrutiny members in 2004/05, we wanted to explore ways in which we could see how our Key Stage 2 results can be improved so they can exceed or at least in line with the national average.

There is already considerable work and effort going into raising our Key Stage 2 results from schools, governors and headteachers including all staff in schools. But there must still be room for improvement, as we have to raise children's expectations and levels of achievement. Parents will also need to play their part in getting the best possible outcomes for their children.

The Local Education Authority is working hard and as it has done over previous years to increase the help and resources to schools wherever possible. All this has to be seen in the context of Medway being one of the lowest revenue funded local authorities in the country.

Most importantly I would like to thank everybody who helped with this inquiry. The school visits were a very valuable and enjoyable experience and I would like to personally thank the headteachers and staff concerned for the time that they gave up to see us. My thanks also go to all the people who attended our meetings and presented information and ideas to us. Finally I would like to express my thanks to senior officers for their advice and guidance and also to our co-ordinator, Bjorn Simpole, for his assistance throughout the inquiry and for producing this report.



Councillor David Wildey - Lead member for Key Stage 2 Inquiry

On behalf of the review team: -



Cllr Richard Guichard



Cllr Peter Hicks



Cllr David Royle



Cllr James Wyper

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Introduction

1. The Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee established an in-depth inquiry into the Key Stage 2 attainment on 9 June 2004. They agreed the membership of the group to carry out this work would comprise: -

Councillor Richard Guichard – Liberal Democrat
Councillor Peter Hicks – Conservative
Councillor David Royle – Conservative
Councillor David Wildey – Conservative
Councillor Jim Wyper – Labour

2. The terms of reference for this inquiry were as follows: -

In comparison to other Education Key Stages, Medway pupils under perform at Key Stage 2 level. Attainment amongst boys is a particular concern with a significant gender gap in results having developed. The group's role was to identify potential recommendations for improving Key Stage 2 attainment by : -

- Investigating the reasons for underperformance at Key Stage 2 in Medway, examining ways in which schools seek to raise attainment and the effectiveness of support provided to schools by the Local Education Authority.
- Focusing on the performance of boys at Key Stage 2, investigating the reasons for the growing gender gap and identifying potential solutions to improve their attainment.

3. From the outset we knew that it would be important for us to speak to representatives from as many schools as possible in order to gain a good insight. We therefore decided to combine the usual method of seeking evidence through meetings with a number of visits to primary schools throughout Medway. Officers provided us with a list of potential schools covering the broad spectrum of high and low achievers from across the whole of Medway.
4. In total, members visited seven primary schools, spoke to three headteachers in an evidence session and heard the views of parent governors representing four more schools. Whilst by no means outlining the full range of opinion in our primary schools, we are confident that the views that have been expressed to us form a reasonably representative sample on which to base a number of our conclusions.
5. In discussing the issue of Key Stage 2 attainment, we have had number of meetings with the Director of Education and Leisure, Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning and Senior Primary Adviser all of which have been valuable in understanding their perspective on the

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issue. In addition we also had an evidence session with officers from the Libraries Service to seek their views on links with schools and ways in which they support pupil's achievement.

6. The full list of evidence sessions and attendees was as follows: -

Date	Witnesses/Visit	Attendees
1 September 2004	Paul Relph – Senior Adviser – Primary Simon Trotter – Assistant Director – Lifelong Learning	Councillors Hicks, Wildey and Wyper
30 September 2004	Duncan Mead – Area Librarian, Chatham Gill Woodhams – Libraries, Information and Museum Services Manager Rose Collinson – Director of Education and Leisure	Councillors Hicks, Royle and Wildey
7 October 2004	Written evidence received from Parkwood Junior School, Rainham	
13 October 2004	Schools: - Gill Hill and Stuart Kay – All Saints CE Primary School, Chatham Pat Sanford – High Halstow Primary School Gwen Thomas – Spinnens Acre Junior School, Lordswood	Councillors Hicks, Royle, Wildey and Wyper
17 November 2004	Parent Governors: - Ian Richards – St Margarets at Troy Town Primary School Silvy Sithamparanathan – Delce Junior School Angela Stephenson – Glencoe Junior School Sally Sweetham – Saxon	Councillors Guichard, Hicks, Royle and Wildey

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	Way Primary School	
7 December 2004	Paul Relph – Senior Adviser – Primary Simon Trotter – Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning	Councillors Hicks, Royle, Wildey and Wyper
15 December 2004	Conclusions meeting Paul Relph – Senior Adviser – Primary Simon Trotter – Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning	Councillors Guichard, Hicks, Royle and Wildey
19 January 2005	Consideration of draft report Simon Trotter – Assistant Director	Councillors Hicks, Royle and Wildey

7. School visits took place on the following dates: -

Date	School	Attendees
4 November 2004	St Helens CE Primary School, Cliffe	Councillors Royle and Wyper
10 November 2004	Warren Wood Primary School, Rochester	Councillors Hicks and Wildey
16 November 2004	Elaine Primary School, Strood	Councillors Hicks and Royle
18 November 2004	Stoke Community Primary School	Councillors Royle and Wildey
22 November 2004	Maudene Primary School, Princes Park	Councillors Royle and Wildey
29 November 2004	St Michaels RC Primary School, Chatham	Councillor Wildey
6 December 2004	Arden Junior School, Gillingham	Councillors Hicks and Wildey

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Section One

Key Stage 2 education in Medway

Medway performance and results at Key Stage 2

8. As set out in the introduction, the inquiry was initiated to examine why Key Stage 2 results in Medway fall well short of the national average (in contrast to other Key Stages) and what steps elected members felt could be made by both schools and the Council to secure improved levels of attainment.
9. For a number of years whilst Key Stage 1 results have been consistently close to the national average, pupils levels of achievement at Key Stage 2 fall behind, only for them to be improve at Key Stage 3. Results at Key Stage 4 are in some respects above the national average which is a testament to the great work being undertaken in our secondary schools.
10. The timing of this work meant that the 2003/04 results were published near the end of inquiry. These results whilst showing small improvements in both English and Mathematics were disappointing when viewed against rising levels attainment in local authorities with similar levels of performance. With poor Science results in 2003/04 Medway has slipped further behind the national average, which has meant that there is even more to do now to bring performance up to the standard that it should be.
11. The following tables show Key Stage 2 results against the national average for 2004 and 2003: -

Level 4+	English			Mathematics			Science		
	2003	2004	Diffce.	2003	2004	Diffce	2003	2004	Diffce
Medway	70	72	+2	68	69	+1	83	82	-1
National	75	77	+2	73	74	+1	87	86	-1

Level 5	English			Mathematics			Science		
	2003	2004	Diffce	2003	2004	Diffce	2003	2004	Diffce
Medway	21	23	+2	25	27	+2	34	34	0
National	27	27	0	29	31	+2	41	43	+2

12. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) stocktake at the beginning of December 2004 concluded that results at Key Stage 2 should be much better than they are. We would endorse that and emphasise that there is no reason as to why pupils between years 3

and 6 should not be performing as well if not even better than their peers elsewhere in the country (**Review Finding 1**).

A mixed picture across Medway schools

13. Analysis of the results by school shows a very mixed picture of performance across Medway. There are a number of primary schools in areas of social deprivation, who despite having large numbers of pupils with additional educational needs, consistently produce outstanding Key Stage 2 results. Conversely, the council recognises that there are a significant number of schools where standards are not what they should be and pupils underachieve.
14. Our programme of visits to primary schools included tours of a number of schools that had previously been in difficulties but were now recognised by Ofsted to be good. Results at schools such as St Helens, Cliffe and Stoke Primary in recent years have been dramatically improved with the aid of a new headteacher and highly committed teaching staff. This illustrated to us that it was possible to transform the performance of a school in a relatively short space of time and these examples should be inspirational to other schools where pupils are currently underachieving.

Adding value and the importance of Key Stage 1

15. DfES league tables for schools include a Value Added measure for Key Stage 2 results. These measure the progress that an individual pupil makes from Key Stage 1 to 2 and are considered to be a fairer way of measuring a schools performance. Analysis of the results again shows mixed performance across schools with a large proportion of schools scoring below the national average of 100. In many of these schools this means that not enough pupils are making the kind of progress that they should be.
16. Advice from officers suggests that schools are good at ensuring that high achievers make good progression, with a high proportion of Level 3's in English at Key Stage 1 being converted into Level 5's at Key Stage 2. However, problems lie with the numbers of pupils who achieve Level 2 at Key Stage 1 but then do not go on to achieve Level 4 at Key Stage 2, which they would be expected to do.
17. It must also be recognised that part of the solution to underachievement at Key Stage 2 is to be more ambitious at Key Stage 1. Currently Medway schools perform at around the national average and if results could be marginally improved this could have tremendous benefits for educational outcomes at the end of year 6.

Medway's Gender Gap

18. A major element of the focus for this inquiry has been to explore Medway's gender gap in achievement between boys and girls. Whilst

this is a relevant issue at all Key Stages, with females outperforming their male counterparts, the huge discrepancy in results is most pronounced at Key Stage 2. In particular boys writing has been a cause for concern for some time. Focused work has been taking place with schools to support the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target on improving Key Stage 2 results.

19. Explanations for reasons as to why boys tend to underachieve compared to girls include: -
- Girls prefer the continuous assessment process which tends to favour them
 - Girls have a more mature approach to learning at this age
 - Lack of good male role models in many pupil's lives
 - Boys are more affected by lack of consistency in teaching
 - Boys tend to require more praise and need greater help to develop speech and language skills
 - They are more affected by the constraints of the national curriculum and benefit from being able to write about subjects they choose
20. The picture of girls outperforming boys is not however replicated across all Medway schools. In fact, in a number of the schools we visited boys actually outperformed girls in Key Stage 2 tests. Some placed a great degree of importance for this on the presence of male teaching staff, as well as the impact that specific strategies for raising boys achievement have. However, large-scale research has failed to establish such a relationship. Whilst the simple solution to raising boys achievement is not simply to employ more male teachers, some felt male staff were a motivating factor for many pupils particularly those who might be lacking a good male role model in their lives. The kind of strategies that some schools use to target boys achievement are outlined below.

Lessons from national studies on raising achievement

21. Looking beyond Medway, the gender gap is a national issue and in recognition of this the DfES established a 'Raising Boys Achievement Project', currently in the third of its four years. The stated aim of the project is to identify the strategies employed by specific schools which appear to be effective in raising boys achievement and reducing the gender gap, while crucially, not adversely affecting girls' academic performance.
22. Some interesting initial conclusions from the project team's work in primary schools have been drawn. Improved boys performance is associated with: -
- In literacy using a more integrated approach, short structured tasks and drama to bring writing and stories to life
 - Motivating children to see themselves as authors through the production of their own books

- Shared reading initiatives with less confident readers paired as tutors with younger readers
 - Ensuring that schools have resources that appeal to boys, non-fiction books and on practical topics
 - Learning intentions and attainment targets clearly articulated to pupils
 - A focus on IT being a motivator for boys
 - Challenging dominant images of masculinity by creating an alternative culture within the school where each child wants to learn
 - Schools' strategies should focus on raising boys underachievement specifically where this is an issue rather than broadly for all pupils
23. The final report of this study will no doubt be of great interest to the council and Medway schools when the project is completed next year. Its conclusions will be a further aid on which we can develop good practice on raising boys achievement.
24. The Medway gender gap has also been the subject of a report commissioned by the council and was compiled by the Basic Skills Agency in June 2004. This formed part of the evidence base considered by us. The report brings together a number of interesting examples of practices by various Local Education Authorities in relation to boys achievement. Interestingly they also state that the gender gap is an international phenomenon.
25. The Basic Skills Agency view is that a focus by schools solely on gender is not likely to succeed because there are many reasons as to why pupils underachieve including social class and ethnic origin. Addressing underachievement must be a 'whole school approach' and in summary their main conclusions are: -
- Boys underachievement persists throughout the education system at national level
 - Boys often have different preferred learning styles to those favoured by girls and responding to these boosts their achievement
 - The parental role is crucial
 - A focus on the individual and a reward system allied with disciplinary procedures is helpful
 - Boys respond well to short term targets, they need to feel they are succeeding
 - The Local Education Authority should have a clear picture of those schools that are underachieving and have the largest gender gap, as well as those that show good practice
 - Boys achievement needs to be discussed in consortia/cluster groups and best practice shared

Strategies used by schools to raise attainment

26. In speaking to representatives of fourteen Medway primary schools we sought to gain an understanding of the nature of strategies currently

used in Medway schools to raise achievement both specifically for boys and across the board.

27. These are some examples of ways Medway schools seek to raise achievement: -

Parkwood Junior School

28. Boys underachievement has been addressed by the male deputy head taking over leadership of year 6, changing history topics to World War Two and Medway at war, purchasing of boy friendly books, chasing up reluctant homework completers, providing parents with support material to help them read with their children, literacy and numeracy fun evenings and not accepting work that is not of a high enough standard.

Spinnens Acre Junior School

29. For boys; use of different learning styles, extensive use of interactive whiteboards and ICT, sports provision, leading literacy teacher sharing her expertise and research with all staff, Arethusa Project – raising boys achievement through drama and use of inclusion strategies and initiatives.
30. For all; seeking to gain the Basic Skills Quality Mark, homework club, IQ testing used to identify underachieving pupils, target setting for individuals and groups, developing performance management culture in school and an annual survey of parents.

All Saints Primary School

31. Targets are set involving everybody and these are shared with all teachers and results are analysed to inform planning for the year. There is a high focus to ensure these targets are maintained. In addition; intervention strategies are used with booster classes for those who will benefit most, there is a high expectation and praise culture across the school and regular structured homework is given.

Stoke Primary School

32. Extensive planning of lessons with very clearly defined objectives and outcomes for pupils at each level. Great improvements shown in Key Stage 2 results now. Also the kind of topics selected for story writing are ones that will excite and engage pupils.

Target setting and effective use of data

33. In exploring what makes a successful strategy for high achievement, we would conclude that effective target setting for individual pupils is crucial. In those schools we have spoken to with very good Key Stage

2 results, target setting and rigorous monitoring of performance has been central to their success.

34. Amongst those schools we visited that have faced challenges in terms of recent negative Ofsted reports, areas for improvement identified have been better systems of tracking pupil progress and addressing strategies appropriately.
35. In discussions with officers we have been informed that this is a key area that is of concern to them. Systems within each school vary greatly with highly complex computerised programmes being operated in many schools whilst others are still using manual systems. In order to track a pupil's progress from year R onwards effectively we believe that these tools are essential. We would urge those schools who do not currently have the ability to track progress of pupils, set personalised targets and identify underachievement to address this as a matter of priority (**Review Finding 2**).
36. Such data systems should also be utilised by schools to ensure that pupils from groups that are more prone to underachieve than the general school population are identified (**Review Finding 3**).
37. As outlined above there are many ways in which strategies can be adapted in ways that promote achievement specifically amongst boys. A number of schools in evidence to us have shown how they have bucked the trend of boys underachievement. We believe that the gender breakdown of performance and results is a very important statistic for schools to have and adjust their approaches and strategies accordingly. Of course the key is to raise boys achievement without in the course of doing so undermining the performance of girls. We recognise that this is a difficult balance to strike (**Review Finding 4**).

Management Information Service

38. Allied to the ability of schools to effectively set targets for pupils is the support they receive from the Management Information Service of the Council. In her evidence to us, Rose Collinson – Director of Education and Leisure, highlighted that a key priority for her was to strengthen the capacity of the service. With a small team it is difficult for them to be able to provide all the information to schools that they require to help them establish the kind of systems highlighted above.
39. The inability to collect, analyse and interpret data is currently identified as a weakness with many other local authorities having more sophisticated systems in place to track pupil and school performance. For example it was highlighted to us that at the time the council did not have the ability to identify where the lowest achieving 20% of pupils are by school. This kind of information is crucial so that effective responses to identified needs are developed.

40. Given the size of the non-delegated budget for Education there clearly is little scope for seeking an increasing in the size of this team through a recommendation to Cabinet. However, officers have now reprioritised existing resources and strengthened the team. We believe that the Management Information Team will now be in a better position to provide an effective supporting role to schools (**Review Finding 5**).

Lesson observations

41. A number of the schools that we visited were kind enough to allow us to observe a lesson and see the way pupils are taught. This was a very informative experience which highlighted just how much the nature of primary education had changed over time. An impressive array of interactive whiteboards, pupil props such as coins for counting and targeted support for low achievers by Learning Support Assistants were witnessed. Overall we were very impressed by the way literacy was taught in a numeracy lesson and the overall level of expectations and knowledge that Key Stage 2 pupils were expected to have.
42. The real challenge that teachers have is being able to devise a lesson that is able to meet the learning needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities. In those few lessons that we witnessed we saw this in action through some quite inspirational teaching.

Delivering a broad curriculum

43. It has been shown that a broad curriculum can be very effective in engaging boys in particular in learning. This is also true for all pupils that are not high achievers. We have heard some interesting examples of ways in which schools can look to diversify the curriculum and make it interesting and engaging for pupils. The use of local history was a good approach highlighted by a number of schools we spoke to, because this makes the subject more relevant for pupils rather than in abstract form from a textbook (**Review Finding 6**).
44. The national curriculum need not be a constraint to schools, as there are plenty of opportunities to build on the basic syllabus with exciting topics that capture pupils imaginations.
45. We were particularly impressed with the approach taken by Arden Junior School. This school is located within the Gillingham Education Action Zone and has a cohort of pupils many of whom have Special Educational Needs and are from challenging backgrounds. They have embraced the themes of excellence and enjoyment in the national primary strategy and have introduced a significant element of practical homework to the curriculum. This can take the form of building models, cars etc. The most positive aspect of this has been the effective engagement of parents in their child's work, particularly for those who do not have particularly good experiences of school. We would suggest that all schools explore how practical homework exercises can form a significant proportion of the curriculum (**Review Finding 7**).

Role of the advisory service

46. The Medway Advisory Service includes a number of link advisers whose role is to support, monitor and challenge schools performance. This role is crucial as it acts as the eyes and ears of the local authority within the school, identifying difficulties that arise before they are highlighted via an external inspection. Under the recently agreed Primary Strategy the amount of minimum time spent in each school by a link adviser has been increased from one to two days per annum and this is welcomed.
47. However we are informed that each primary link adviser now has around 20 schools for which they are responsible, a figure higher than for many other local education authorities. We do have concerns about the capacity of the service to be able respond to effectively to the demands placed on their time. We have therefore requested a further paper from officers about the role of the advisory service in supporting and challenging schools (**Review Finding 8**).
48. Overall schools were complimentary about the quality of service they receive from their link adviser, although some felt they would obviously benefit from any additional support that could be provided. It is clear to us that there is no capacity within the service to provide an opportunity for schools to buy back further support. We would therefore suggest that the council makes it easier for schools to be confident purchasers of services provided by external organisations. This is however likely to have a cost implication and a cheaper option could be to provide a list of current providers used by schools (**Review Finding 9**).
49. The role of the Link Adviser was discussed with the DfES at the recent stocktake exercise and an outcome of this meeting is an agreement that work with schools should be more focused on those pupils who are not making enough progress. Time that advisers have in school is limited and precious and we welcome moves to utilise this time in the most effective ways possible.

Additional targeted support for schools

50. Greater targeted support has been introduced for those schools that require more help from the Council. This takes the form of support that has always been provided to schools that have had poor Ofsted judgements and require assistance to improve. As well as this, a number of specific initiatives are now in place that many schools benefit from: -
 - The Intensifying Support Programme provides support to the 9 primary schools where 65% of pupils do not achieve Level 4 at Key Stage 2
 - The Primary Leadership Programme pairs successful school leaders with those requiring support and provides 24 schools with

15 days of supply cover to allow release time for staff development and access to specialist help

- A schools standards and review group has been established to determine the level of support required by schools and moderate headteacher's self-assessments

51. Whilst schools who we spoke to agree that support should be provided in inverse proportion to success, there were some concerns from high achieving schools that they will miss out on information that would be valuable to them. We would therefore ask officers to ensure that they provide feedback from these programmes to all schools via the usual communication channels.

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Section Two

Factors that affect pupil attainment

Attendance

52. Medway's figures for pupil attendance have been consistently good over recent years when compared with our statistical and neighbouring local authorities. There is no room for complacency however and evidence to us from a number of teachers indicated a persistent problem in schools with a few pupils who have a poor attendance record. The issue of term time holidays continues to be an issue which schools and the council are seeking to discourage. Notwithstanding the obvious financial reasons for parents choosing to take holidays in term time, it must be made clear that missing significant periods of school during the year does have an impact on attainment.
53. Several headteachers were able to recall individual pupils who they felt had underachieved where poor attendance was a factor. The evidence is pretty clear that pupils who miss large sections of school are likely to fall behind and underachieve. We must continue to ensure this message is made loud and clear to all **(Review Finding 10)**.

Behaviour and Inclusion

54. Good behaviour is clearly integral to effective learning and achievement and we were very impressed during our school visits by the high expectations of good behaviour and the response of pupils. Many of our schools are in areas with relatively high levels of deprivation and have significant numbers of pupils who have challenging backgrounds. In those schools we visited it was clear that bad behaviour was not tolerated and that members of staff would act decisively if poor behaviour arose. This is a crucial tool for effective learning and provides pupils with discipline and order that many may not have in their home lives.
55. Conversely, it is important that exclusions are used as a last resort due to the impact that they have for a child's learning and the impact they have generally for society as a whole. Exclusions from Medway schools, both fixed term and permanent, are far too high and the range of initiatives used by schools and the council have been well documented and discussed by overview and scrutiny members. Getting the balance between inclusion and protecting the right of pupils to learn free of distraction is a difficult issue for our schools to deal with.
56. Some concerns were raised by the headteacher of a school we visited about difficulties in securing appropriate support for a pupil who had been permanently excluded and placed at his school. Problems had

been experienced with communication and provision of information about the pupil's background. In addition, he was very concerned about how the year 6 pupil would cope in a mainstream secondary school. These are situations which we are sure all primary schools have to deal with from time to time and we recognise that there can be some tension between results on which schools are judged and inclusion.

Role of Teaching Assistants

57. The workforce reforms being introduced from September 2005 will provide teaching staff with 10% of time out of the classroom for lesson preparation, marking, personal development etc. This will place even greater importance on the role of teaching assistants in the classroom. In lesson observations we saw how teaching assistants are deployed, often to work with the low achievers in the class. Their role is very important as it enables a lesson to be relevant to all pupils; low, average and high achievers. The role of teaching assistants in raising achievement should not be underestimated and with the workplace reforms the impact that they have on children's learning is likely to increase.
58. Medway schools are at different stages of preparation for the implementation of the reforms and we are sure that those schools that have good teaching assistants will not have any problems. However, we do have some concerns that a number of schools may find the reforms difficult to successfully implement. We are aware that the council's School Improvement Manager is leading on support for schools on this matter. The reforms will further increase the important role that teaching assistants have to play in classrooms and with increased responsibilities additional training needs could arise.

Parental Involvement and Expectations

59. Part of the challenge for schools to be able to raise achievement is to have parents fully on board and assisting in ways that will benefit a child's learning. Simple things like reading a bedtime story and taking an interest in homework can make an enormous difference for a child's progress. Unfortunately many parents will not have had very positive experiences of school so ensuring that they take an active interest in their child's education can be a challenge.
60. Parent Teacher Associations are successful in many of our primary schools but lack of interest and willingness to volunteer have meant they have been disbanded in a number of schools we spoke to. The main reason highlighted for this was that they tended to be dominated by teaching staff, which rather defeated their purpose.
61. We asked about numbers of parents that attend parents evenings and other similar meetings. Overwhelmingly we found that attendance tended to be poor at meetings considered to be the traditional type of information evenings about the school, but considerably more

engagement was found where parents were invited to come and talk about their child's progress. Clearly parental involvement varies from school to school, but effective communication and asking parents what kind of events/meetings they would like to see appear to be sensible suggestions.

Pupil Engagement

62. We were impressed to hear that a number of the schools we visited had school councils operating with representatives from each class. These enable pupils to have a real sense of ownership of their school and allow them to participate in decisions about the way it is run. Other interesting initiatives we saw were; a type of helper scheme where older pupils assist younger children in the playground, opportunities for older pupils to run the school reception desk during break times and fundraising schemes for charity.

Recruitment and Retention

63. Being located in the south east of England, public organisations across Medway experience recruitment and retention difficulties. Higher costs of living along with our proximity to London present challenges to recruiting high quality staff and retaining their services. Over 100 NQTs every year start working across Medway schools and the challenge is to retain staff who schools are investing a lot of time and money in. Some drop out of teaching due to the demands of the job whilst many others obtain promotion quite quickly with schools outside of Medway.
64. A number of the schools we visited had bounced back from poor Ofsted judgements in the past to be very effective and the view of these headteachers was that stability through highly committed staff was a crucial element in their success. A continual turnover of good teaching staff is bound to have an impact on pupil's achievement, especially where it is not possible to recruit experienced members of staff to replace those who have left.
65. Pupils in primary schools can be greatly affected by the absence of a teacher who provides good lessons and consistency. However achievement at Key Stages 3 and 4 is generally better. So we would not say that recruitment and retention issues are a huge factor in underachievement at Key Stage 2, although they may be a contributory one in some schools with particular difficulties (**Review Finding 11**).

Selection Tests

66. We were interested to explore what effect, if any, that the selection tests had for Key Stage 2 results. In discussion with headteachers a number felt that with the 11+ taking place in January and Key Stage 2 results not until May, it is clear that many pupils and parents view the selection test as the key measure of success rather than the SAT's. They felt that as a result both pupils who have passed the test and

those who have been unsuccessful might be demotivated by May for their Key Stage 2 tests. There certainly appears to be a reasonable amount of anecdotal evidence to support this, given that Medway results at Key Stage are some way short of the national average but rise at Key Stage 3.

67. Work conducted by the council's management information service has been carried out in comparing the test results in Medway with those of Calderdale, an authority which we are matched with for statistical purposes. Calderdale also has selection at the end of year 6, but their Key Stage 2 results make very different reading to ours. In Calderdale at the end of Key Stage 1, results are above the national average and this continues at Key Stage 2 where performance is three points above the national average. Once pupils reach secondary school however performance drops to the national average.
68. This does not therefore provide us with sufficient evidence that the selection process has a depressing effect on Key Stage 2 results. However, what is clear is that to many parents and pupils the tests are viewed as a matter largely of concern to schools as to where they will finish in league tables. We must emphasise that Key Stage 2 tests are an indication for future success in GCSE examinations and are used by secondary schools to measure pupil's abilities **(Review Finding 12)**.

Early Years Provision

69. In exploring achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 it is also important to understand the role that early years provision has in giving children a good start in life. Medway has very diverse pre-school provision with a large number of pre-schools in the non-maintained sector. Increasingly however it seems that more schools are looking at introducing nursery provision on site. Reasons put forward for this to us have included; concerns about pupils' abilities when they arrive in the reception class, increasing links with the local community and also as a means to address concerns about falling rolls.
70. There are views currently prevalent amongst educationalists that children get a bigger headstart through maintained sector early years provision. We would emphasise that Medway needs to have a range of early years options available to parents that suit an individual child's needs.
71. Recent changes to the foundation stage in schools are clearly designed to improve standards and we would expect to see the benefits of this in terms of improved results at both Key Stages 1 and 2 in the coming years **(Review Finding 13)**.

Transitions

72. Medway has a considerable number of separate Infant and Junior Schools and the council's policy is to examine potential amalgamations

of schools when opportunities to do so arise. Officers are of the view that the fewer changes of school there are for pupils, the better it is for their education. We support the position that all-through primary schools have benefits of removing a transition from year 2 to 3. However, we must recognise that some pupils may prefer being in a separate infant or junior school.

73. In dealing with transitions from infant to junior school, there are good arrangements in place between many schools with class visits, teacher exchanges etc in place. This is relatively easy to arrange between schools based on the same site, but for those infant schools that do not have junior schools where most if not all pupils progress to, this is not as easy to organise.
74. Similar arrangements are also in place between junior and secondary schools. This is however more complicated to arrange as pupils could be progressing to any of the secondary schools in Medway. Where there is a secondary school close to a primary school, such as with Warren Wood Primary School and Thomas Aveling, there has been a close relationship. Similarly on the Hoo Peninsula, primary schools will traditionally work with the Hundred of Hoo School because the majority of pupils progress on there.

Role of Governing Bodies

75. The role of the governing body is absolutely crucial to the success of the school. A headteacher is heavily reliant on his/her governing body for advice, support and challenge. A great deal of time, effort and commitment is required to perform the role of a governor and it is amazing really that there are so many people who are willing to be governors, as they receive no remuneration. Shortages of governors do exist in some schools however and in others concerns were raised with us about the ability to recruit governors of a high enough calibre who were able to commit the time required. Strong governing bodies are critical to ensuring that standards are rigorously monitored. We support the work the council carries out in assisting those schools which experience difficulties in this area (**Review Finding 14**).
76. Those headteachers and parent governors that we spoke to were all highly complimentary about the work carried out by the council's governor services team. As well as their important role in recruitment they provide general advice and arrange and deliver training. We were pleased to hear that take-up of training for parent governors on data management has been well attended, as this is a role which we emphasise as crucial to raising achievement elsewhere in the report. On-going discussions are required between schools and the council to ensure that the training needs of governors are reflected in the training programme (**Review Finding 15**).

Other factors

77. Participation in the plethora of schools initiatives that exist can excite and motivate pupils. Many Medway schools are involved in such projects as Eco-Schools, Healthy Schools Initiative and Inclusive Schools Mark. We saw the kind of work Stoke Community Primary School carry out with recycling, composting, growing vegetables and development of their outside play area. A great deal of opportunities exist to participate in such projects and for schools not involved in any projects, their pupils may be missing out.
78. Participation in sport is an important tool with which to motivate pupils, particularly those who are not high-achievers. All the schools we heard views from have some form of link with either the Gillingham Football Club community scheme or with another football club and value the impact that it has had for pupils. For a number of schools these schemes also brought the advantage of bringing additional male role models into the school, which for some with predominately female teaching staff is important.
79. Good links with Social Services were also highlighted as important by a number of schools. Many schools will have pupils who are on the at risk register or are known to social services for other reasons. It is crucial that headteachers participate in meetings about such pupils and establish a good working relationship with the social worker. Headteachers also have a role in communicating relevant information to the pupils' teacher.

Section Three

Delivering rising levels of achievement over the coming years

Medway Libraries Service

80. Libraries have a significant role to play in encouraging pupils to enjoy reading and develop writing skills. During the last academic year the Medway Libraries Service worked with 52 primary/junior schools, amounting to contact with around 3000 Key Stage 2 pupils. This took the form of either visits by library staff to the school or class visits to their local library. General services for schools include: -
- Library Information Skills Days
 - Making books with illustrators
 - Talks on popular authors such as JK Rowling
 - Assistance for school book weeks
 - Introducing a teachers ticket which allows them to borrow more books
 - Chargeable library consultancy service
81. As well as this there have been a number of specific projects with Key Stage 2 pupils designed to improve attainment. Often these have been targeted at particular pupils who it was felt would benefit from additional help. For instance, the 'Literacy for Life' project brought together a storyteller and artist to work with year 3 pupils who needed help to improve literacy skills. Over 1000 pupils also participated in the last summer reading challenge, which rewards pupils who borrow library books over the summer holiday. In addition a 'Readers United' project has worked with year 6 pupils who have been identified as requiring additional support with reading and writing. The effect of these schemes as well as others has been to encourage membership of local libraries which in the context of falling levels of book borrowing is viewed as very important for the future of the service.
82. Our discussions with schools indicated that links with local libraries varied enormously. Some schools had a close relationship and took the opportunity to take classes to their local library, whilst others had little or no contact whatsoever. For some primary schools (particularly in parts of Rainham and the Hoo Peninsula) this is simply a matter of not having a library close enough to be able to access. However for many others they are missing out on valuable resources that can help pupil's achievement.
83. We are pleased to hear that the service was recently able to secure 23,000 books following the closure of the Kent School Book Loan

Scheme and that these have been allocated to weaker libraries to improve their stock. This will make those libraries more attractive to children and families.

84. We recognise that the libraries service's resources are limited and currently there is a limit to the amount of work that they are able to carry out with schools. Indeed it is clear that officers within the service would like to further strengthen their links with schools. We would like to see a more pro-active stance taken in terms of relationships with schools, as there is much the service has to offer in terms of resources and expertise **(Review Finding 16)**.
85. It must also be recognised that this should be a two-way process and that schools could also be more pro-active in seeking to invite library staff to come to them. We saw how many schools now have developed an excellent school library of their own, which is to be welcomed, but we are a little concerned that some schools are over-reliant on their own resources and could be doing more to encourage pupils to join their local library **(Review Finding 17)**.
86. Our discussions with senior officers from the Libraries Service also focused on ways in which the profile of libraries can generally be raised and how they become better integrated into children's learning. Some local authorities have a school library service and in East and West Sussex, schools are provided with book boxes. These are valuable ways in improving links but resources simply do not exist to roll out such schemes in Medway. Something which officers were keen to introduce was a Book Awards scheme for Key Stage 2 pupils. These are run in many other areas and strike us as a sensible addition to the range of existing work with Medway schools **(Review Finding 18)**.
87. After school clubs are run in a number of libraries such as Gillingham, Cuxton and Twydall. It is also hoped to introduce after school clubs at the newly opened library in Chatham. These are valuable in bringing pupils into the library to show what they have to offer. A key area that the service does not offer currently are homework clubs. These were run at Gillingham Library but were closed due to lack of resources. We are informed that the vast majority of Library Services across the country offer homework clubs and think that their introduction in our larger town centre libraries would be extremely beneficial to younger pupils **(Review Finding 19)**.

Medway Museums

88. We were pleased to hear that so many of the schools we spoke to took pupils to Medway museums, in particular the Guildhall Museum, Rochester. As highlighted elsewhere in the report, bringing the curriculum to life through the teaching of local history is a very effective way of engaging the interest of pupils. Other local tourist attractions such the Historic Dockyard, Rochester Castle and Cathedral are accessed by schools.

89. Large numbers of Key Stage 2 pupils have benefited from the services offered by the museums service and their team has recently been complemented by an officer to go into schools. The service manager is of the view that there is even more work museums staff could do with schools and an additional self-funded post could be introduced to enhance links. Schools that wished to would be able to purchase enhanced support from the museums service. We'd suggest that the number of schools interested in purchasing additional support be explored to determine if a post would be self-funding (**Review Finding 20**).

Accommodation

90. Having good school buildings that are conducive to effective learning is an important factor in ensuring that pupils are able to achieve to the best of their ability. Capital schemes over the last few years have resulted in significant investment and new buildings at primary schools with the greatest needs.
91. We were impressed with the extension of the school at Elaine Primary School, Strood completed in 2001, as this provided good sized classrooms and a large corridor area with plenty of space for resources. Two examples of Victorian buildings that we saw at Stoke Primary and Arden Junior, showed an impressive use of an older type of building. We are very pleased to note that St Michaels RC Primary School will be shortly receiving funding for a substantial new build on their site, as our visit there showed that their current premises are inadequate as a modern teaching environment.
92. Our visit to Maundene Primary School highlighted the constraints that a number of Medway Primary Schools must face. Built in 1976, the amount of space available within the school is very limited. Classrooms are much smaller than in many other schools we visited and all the available space in the school is utilised in some way. It is therefore to the credit of the headteacher and everyone concerned with the school that they have consistently produced some of the highest Key Stage 2 results in Medway over the last few years. We do think that poor accommodation will impact on pupil's achievement but clearly this is not an insurmountable barrier.

Falling rolls in the primary sector

93. Of concern to headteachers and members alike is the situation of falling rolls across Medway primary schools. Falls in birth rates both nationally and locally are affecting the number of pupils that are coming through into schools. We note that the council's planning and review team will be monitoring the situation of surplus places closely and will come forward with proposals as appropriate in the future.

Use of technology

94. Interactive whiteboards are increasingly being used as visual aids to stimulate learning in the classroom. We are impressed by the way schools are embracing the use of new technology, as it is important that schools keep up to date with such developments. Significant investment is going into the provision of ICT suites. Studies have shown that boys in particular respond well to the use of ICT and it is a tool used to raise their achievement. One note of caution we would sound is that increased reliance on ICT in the classroom may have the effect of impacting on standards of handwriting, which is a concern.

Breakfast and After-School Clubs

95. A number of the schools we visited had experience of running breakfast and after-school clubs. We heard about the positive impact that the clubs had for those children participating, as it ensured that they arrived at school on time, started lessons with breakfast inside them as well as allowing schools to encourage the playing of educational games and interacting with fellow pupils.
96. Breakfast clubs have been funded through a number of funding streams such as Pathfinder and the Gillingham Education Action Zone (EAZ). Unfortunately such funding streams have ended which have meant that schools that wish to carry on providing these clubs must either fund them themselves or charge parents for their use. We believe that breakfast clubs represent a great opportunity to provide pupils with the best possible start to the day and have a significant role to play in achievement. We would encourage both schools to provide such clubs at a reasonable cost and for parents to use them (**Review Finding 21**).

Encouraging the sharing of good practice

97. The sharing of good practice between schools is easier said than done. Five primary consortia are in place across Medway to encourage dialogue between schools within geographic areas, but it would be fair to say that some have been more successful than others. Two of the schools that we visited highlighted that they did currently attend meetings of their consortia. One of these headteachers identified the size of the consortia as a principal reason for not feeling they got much benefit from them. He suggested that smaller networks of schools particularly neighbouring schools and those with a similar pupil profile would be beneficial.
98. Primary residential conferences have been introduced over the last few years and these are a positive step forward in assisting schools build relationships with each other. We would however be interested to see the council do as much as it can to facilitate greater sharing of good practice as possible. The new support programmes for schools are very much welcomed but as emphasised elsewhere in the report it is

important that the experiences of these are shared with all primary schools (**Review Finding 22**).

Experiences from the Gillingham Education Zone

99. We felt that it was particularly important that we visited a primary school within the Gillingham EAZ to discuss different approaches to raising achievement that schools were able to introduce with the additional funding provided. Arden Junior School put a number of new initiatives into place which included a story teller to work with pupils (which proved to be so successful that the school have continued to fund this), classes with a local artist and a car project. Overall the headteacher felt that the EAZ an opportunity to bring more depth to the curriculum and did have a demonstrable effect on results.
100. It is difficult to judge the overall impact of the Gillingham EAZ at this stage because the full effects of initiatives may not be realised for a number of years. In terms of immediate impact on results, the picture has been mixed with some of the schools not showing improvements in their Key Stage 2 results.
101. The work of the Gillingham EAZ will be built upon through the Excellence Cluster which started operating at the beginning of January 2005. The cluster includes all of the existing schools within the EAZ as well as the addition of three further primary schools in Luton and Central Chatham and Robert Napier School and New Brompton College. Funding for the full year will be £775,320 and clearly much of this will be used in ways that seeks to raise achievement at Key Stage Two.

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Conclusion

102. Our intention when commencing this inquiry was to produce a meaningful contribution from overview and scrutiny members to assist schools and the council in addressing what has proved to be a stubborn statistic. We have found it to be widely recognised that our Key Stage 2 results are not good enough. There are no simple solutions or magic formulas to raising achievement of pupils overnight but we have identified a number of practical steps which we believe can make a difference. Greater support for poorer performing schools via various programmes form a bedrock of the primary strategy and represent the right way forward. There are also many ways in which schools can specifically address low attainment amongst boys which we have set out in the report.
103. The DfES five year strategy for children and learners sets out clear expectations for how government expects pupils attainment at all levels to improve. The Primary Schools section highlights the great progress that has been made over the last few years through significant improvements in achievement but there is no room for complacency. The strategy advocates a more personalised approach across the whole curriculum, adjusting teaching methods to the individual learning needs of the child. Ultimately by 2008, the target is that 85% of pupils will be achieving Level 4 in Key Stage 2 tests, a challenge which Medway schools with support from the council must rise to.
104. In view of these challenging targets, we must make reference to the revenue funding settlements over the last few years which has seen the amount of non-delegated funding for schools restricted to rises below the national average for unitary authorities. We would very much like to see greater investment in support services to schools, so for example, the number of schools that each link adviser works with can be reduced. However it is a source of frustration to us that a lack of retained funding could be affecting the council's ability to support schools as much as we'd like to (**Review Finding 23**).
105. Chairs of Governors and Governing Bodies generally have an absolutely critical role to play in raising attainment. The support and challenge they provide to the headteacher is crucial in ensuring that every pupil is given every chance to succeed (**Review Finding 24**).
106. We believe that there are number of key factors that must be in place in order to secure high attainment. First of all, it has been clear to us that those schools that have been very successful are well-led and have a strong management team in place to support the headteacher. Secondly, preparation and planning of lessons that engage the interest of pupils, as well as good teaching with clearly defined outcomes are crucial. Thirdly, effective data management systems that establish targets for pupils and highlight pupils who are underachieving is important. Finally, good behaviour is fundamental to promoting a

culture in which pupils are able and motivated to learn (**Review Finding 25**).

107. Above all, we all have a duty to promote a culture in which all pupils, regardless of background, have high aspirations and believe they can achieve to their full potential (**Review Finding 26**).

Review findings

1. Whilst this years 2004 Key Stage 2 results have shown improvements in English and Maths, rising attainment nationally has meant that Medway has fallen further behind the national average. Science results have also been very disappointing showing a significant drop in 2004. In light of the DfES stocktake we would endorse their view and that of the Council that we can and should do far better.
2. Headteachers and Governors should ensure that they have good data and performance management tools that enable them to track the progress of individual pupils, set personalised targets and highlight areas of underachievement to help target intervention strategies.
3. Headteachers and Governors should ensure they have rigorous data management systems that support the attainment of key groups such as ethnic minority pupils, looked after children and travellers.
4. The gender breakdown of performance and results should be analysed by schools and where boys results are significantly behind those of girls, approaches should be adjusted to specifically target raising the attainment of boys in ways that do not undermine the achievement of girls.
5. We recognise that the Council's management information team has been understrength for some time and we welcome the recent reallocation of resources which will enable the team to perform a more effective role in identifying poor performance and underachievement.
6. Headteachers and Governors should embrace the opportunities that exist to use the breadth of the curriculum to motivate pupils with exciting topics such as World War Two or local history rather than just the standard national curriculum topics.
7. Schools are encouraged to make use of practical homework exercises which stimulate pupils' interest and involve parents. These have been shown to be particularly effective in raising attainment amongst low-achieving boys.
8. Members do have concerns about the size and scope of the link advisory service and have asked for a further paper from officers about their role in supporting and challenging schools.
9. The council should progress plans to quality assure external advisory services to enable schools to become more confident purchasers of additional support.

10. There is a clear link between low attendance and low achievement. We support the efforts of headteachers and the Council in ensuring that the message that non-attendance is unacceptable is clearly made to parents
11. The challenge is for Medway schools to retain the considerable number of Newly Qualified Teachers who start teaching in Medway Schools every year. Whilst recruitment problems are greater in the secondary sector, it is clear that lack of stability of teaching staff has a detrimental impact on pupils achievement.
12. Whilst we have not been able to establish clear evidence for the argument that the selection test is a factor in some students underachieving in Key Stage 2 SAT's, for many they are not viewed with a great deal of importance compared with the 11 plus. A clearer message needs to be made to parents that secondary schools use Key Stage 2 results to measure pupils' abilities and that they are a key indicator of future success in GCSE examinations.
13. We would expect recent improvements in the foundation stage to have benefits for standards at Key Stage 2 in a number of years time.
14. Feedback from a number of schools has indicated some difficulties in securing a full complement of governors who are able to fully support and challenge the headteacher. Strong governing bodies are critical to ensuring that school standards are consistently high. We fully support the work that the council carries out in focusing support on those schools where governor recruitment is a particular problem.
15. Schools are very positive about the support provided to their governing bodies by the council's governor services. Some concerns exist in respect of take-up of some training sessions and discussions with schools are on-going to ensure the full programme reflects their training needs.
16. When resources permit, Medway Libraries Service should take a more pro-active stance in further extending links with schools which whilst in place in a number of areas are non-existent in many others.
17. Headteachers and Governors should encourage pupils to join and access resources in Medway libraries and have visits to their local library if they have one. Many schools have excellent school libraries but they should not rely solely on their own resources.
18. We recommend that Medway Libraries Service introduce a book awards scheme for Key Stage 2 pupils to stimulate greater interest in reading.
19. The establishment of homework clubs for younger pupils in Medway's town centre libraries should be an urgent priority.

20. There is scope for the Museums Service to work with more schools on projects and this could be achieved through an additional self-funded post. It is suggested that the number of schools interested in purchasing additional support from the Museums Service is investigated.
21. We are concerned to hear that successful breakfast clubs in a number of schools have recently closed following the cessation of EAZ funding. We would encourage both schools to provide such clubs at a reasonable cost and for parents to support them.
22. Headteachers would welcome more opportunities for their schools to share ideas and good practice with other schools. We welcome the range of new initiatives that have been put into place to increase dialogue between schools but recommend that the experiences of the Intensifying Support Programme and Primary Leadership Programme be articulated to all schools.
23. The ability of the Council to invest in its support services to schools is undermined by poor funding settlements under which Medway currently has the lowest proportion of retained LEA funding of all unitary authorities in the country.
24. Chairs of Governors and Governing Bodies are encouraged to scrutinise results of learning and teaching in order to demonstrate to parents and others, that pupils can gain every opportunity to succeed.
25. The principal factors which we conclude lead to high attainment are a strong management team led by an inspiring headteacher, highly motivated teaching staff who prepare and plan lessons with clearly defined outcomes and good behaviour amongst pupils who are motivated to learn.
26. We urge all who are working with young people in Medway to promote a culture in which everybody is ambitious to achieve as much as they can.

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Background Documents

Assessment for Learning – Research based principles of assessment for learning to guide classroom practice

Basic Skills Agency Report for Medway Local Education Authority – June 2004

Briefing paper on work undertaken by to assess parental impact on children's learning

Briefing paper on strategies to raise attainment at Spinnens Acre Junior School

Briefing paper on strategies to raise attainment at All Saints CE Primary School

Buckinghamshire County Council – Lifelong Learning O & S Committee, Raising Pupil Attainment at Key Stage 2, June 2003

DfES – Achievement and Assessment Tables 2004 – Key Stage 2 Test Results: Medway

DfES - Excellence and Enjoyment – A National Primary Strategy

DfES - Five year strategy for Children and Learners

DfES – National Curriculum assessment of 11 year olds in England (provisional)

DfES – National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 (revised) and Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 value added measures for 11 year olds in England 2004.

DfES – Raising Boys Achievement Project

- Interim Report – August 2003
- Summary of findings from Primary Schools
- Primary Trials - Overview

Letter from Parkwood Junior School – 7 October 2004

Medway Council – Primary Strategy - 2004

Middlesbrough Council – Education, Skills and Jobs Scrutiny Panel – Pupil Performance – Key Stage 2/3 Transition

Notes of evidence sessions and school visits

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Ofsted report summaries; All Saints CE Primary School, Arden Junior School
Elaine Primary School, High Halstow Primary School, Maundene Primary
School, Spinnens Acre Junior School, St Helens CE Primary School, Cliffe, St
Michaels RC Primary School, Stoke Community Primary School and Warren
Wood Primary School

Stoke Community Primary School – Key Stage 2 results – 2001 – 04

Warren Wood Primary School – Post Ofsted Action Plan 2004 - 05