

Education Commission Report January 2014

South Gloucestershire Council

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Members of the Commission

John Harris (Chair) was Director of Children, Schools and Families in Hertfordshire and Director of Education in Westminster. He now works as a management consultant specialising in Education and Children's Services. He is Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees for the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Professor Chris James is the Professor of Educational Leadership and Management at the University of Bath. He researches and teaches in the leadership, management and governing of schools and colleges. During his career, Chris has worked with a number of local authorities and schools, directed numerous research projects and published extensively. He is a governor of the Ralph Allen School in Bath

Dame Sue John is the headteacher of Lampton School, a converter academy and National Teaching School, which has achieved three consecutive outstanding judgements by OFSTED. Sue is the secondary Director of the London Leadership Strategy, a senior partner in the Challenge Partnership and is currently a non-executive Director at the DfE. She has worked as a National Leader of Education and as project manager for some of London's most challenging schools.

Dr Paul Phillips OBE is the Principal and Chief Executive of Weston College in North Somerset. Under his leadership the college has established a leading position across the south west region and features at the top of national performance tables for Further Education. Paul is a system leader at national level and in the region, where he is a member of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and chairs the LEP Skills Group for the West of England.

Mike Collins works for the National College for Teaching and Leadership as Deputy Lead Associate, Southern region. He spent twenty years working in schools. He has worked at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, and for a Local Authority.

Tony Rooke is the Early Careers Manager at Airbus Filton, He was an apprentice with Rolls Royce and joined Airbus in 1987. He has provided an employment and skills perspective to the work of the Commission.

Foreword by the Chair of the Commission

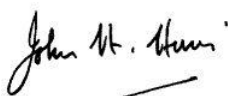
I am delighted to present the Commission's report about the future of secondary and post-16 education and training in South Gloucestershire. The Commission is grateful to everyone who has given us their views and ideas about ways to improve the quality of provision and the educational achievement of young people in South Gloucestershire.

Our report is based on what we have heard from contributors and what we have found. We have sought to bring an external perspective, offering fresh thinking about the opportunities for the local authority, schools, colleges, businesses and training providers, and the wider community to work differently together to deliver better outcomes for all young people.

We have been struck by the extent to which there is agreement about the key challenges for secondary and post-16 education: there is a widening gap between educational attainment at Key Stages 4 and 5 in South Gloucestershire secondary schools in comparison with statistical neighbour local authorities and nationally; value added between Key Stages 2 and 4 is not good enough; the high level of surplus places in secondary schools is leading to inefficient use of resources, stretching schools' capacity to offer an appropriate curriculum; sixth form provision under current arrangements is increasingly unsustainable; and support for employability and skills is underdeveloped. We have found evidence of innovative and effective responses to aspects of these challenges in individual institutions or groups of institutions, but overall there is no shared analysis of what needs to be done nor a systematic framework to take forward the changes required.

The local authority has exercised courageous leadership in inviting the external view of the Commission. The local authority will need to take further bold steps in partnership with headteachers and governors to take difficult decisions about reducing surplus capacity and eradicating poor performance in schools. In doing so it will be important to build capacity for the medium term through formal partnership arrangements between schools, colleges and training providers that will improve educational attainment and post-16 opportunities for all young people.

As the Commission's work programme has progressed, key partners in South Gloucestershire have used the opportunity to reflect on the issues and begin to generate solutions. We are confident that there is the will and capacity to deliver the changes and improvements required.



Executive Summary

Introduction

The South Gloucestershire Education Commission was set up by the local authority to investigate the model of secondary and post-16 provision in South Gloucestershire and the educational achievement of young people. The Commission has taken full account of the responses to a Call for Evidence from all interested parties, data provided by the council and other organisations, meetings with key stakeholders, visits to schools and colleges, and reports and information from other sources.

The Commission has grouped its findings from the evidence into three key themes:

- Improving attainment and progress for all young people, with access to a curriculum relevant to their needs in a 21st century global economy;
- Improving the quality of educational provision in secondary schools and post-16, to ensure that young people have access to, and achieve their potential through the full range of opportunities in education, employment and training;
- Strengthening the impact of leadership by the local authority – taking difficult decisions about surplus school places and poor performance in a timely way, and reframing its arrangements for supporting school improvement to help promote a network of self-improving schools.

The Commission's report will inform the future planning of educational provision and approaches to improving the quality of education in South Gloucestershire.

Improving attainment and progress for all

The local authority, senior officers and school leaders have themselves identified that the gap between the level of educational attainment and progress in South Gloucestershire secondary schools, and that found both in comparable local authorities and nationally, has widened over the past five years. In response, the local authority has exercised courageous leadership in inviting this external review by the Commission to analyse the key issues and recommend solutions.

In our report we have identified key priorities with accompanying recommendations. The most important priority is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Other priorities are in support of this overarching requirement:

- Making better use of performance data to match teaching to the needs of individual pupils
- Improving continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools
- Strengthening pupils' engagement in their learning and reinforcing high expectations

A further priority is to improve the capacity of governors to challenge and hold school leaders to account for their performance

We have found examples of good work in South Gloucestershire secondary schools that address these priorities, particularly where there are formal partnerships between schools. The Commission considers that the participation of all secondary

schools in formal partnership arrangements is required to ensure consistent and systematic action to address the five priorities for improvement.

The low level of age-weighted pupil funding has been cited in evidence to the Commission as a key factor affecting attainment levels in South Gloucestershire secondary schools. We have assessed the validity of this view by conducting a financial benchmarking exercise for a sample of South Gloucestershire schools. We found no clear relationship between the level of total pupil income and performance. Our conclusion is that factors other than funding may be more important in improving the attainment and progress of pupils.

Improving the Quality of Provision – Learning for the Future

Although the population of young people in South Gloucestershire is set to rise by 6,000 over the next thirteen years to 2027 there will be surplus places in secondary schools for the next seven years up to 2021. Over the area as a whole the current surplus is 16.6% but this figure masks significant variations in localities and more acute impacts in the next two years. For example in Yate/Chipping Sodbury the forecast surplus in 2015 will be 25%; in Filton, Patchway, Stoke Gifford, and Bradley Stoke the surplus will be 28%. Such levels of surplus capacity are unsustainable and evidence to the Commission shows that schools are finding it difficult to maintain an appropriate curriculum - particularly at post-16 - as well as managing reductions in staff in a way that retains leadership capacity and specialist expertise.

Rationalisation of surplus capacity in secondary schools provides an opportunity to tackle underperforming secondary schools and promote opportunities for innovation. Such opportunities include developing all-through schools, sixth form centres for groups of schools and a studio school.

In the context of surplus places and the need to compete for pupils, secondary schools see the retention of sixth forms as essential to their ability to recruit teachers, retain pupil numbers and funding. With local authority support over a period of years, schools have established consortium arrangements with varying degrees of complexity and variable effectiveness. Working in consortia has enabled schools to maintain a wider curriculum offer, including joint arrangements and access to provision in colleges and with training providers. Even with these arrangements the numbers in school sixth forms are relatively low and the student attainment level remains below statistical neighbours and national levels. Provision for young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) post-16 is under developed. Accordingly, there is now an urgent need to rationalise post-16 provision, with schools, colleges and training organisations working through formal partnership arrangements to offer a relevant curriculum offer to meet the needs of all learners. Sub-regional specialist vocational provision, linked to the developing economy of the area, should form part of these developments.

Relatively low numbers of young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET) but the proportion of young people in work-based training or employment with training is significantly out of balance. Evidence presented to the Commission from a number of sources suggests that too great a proportion of young people are following academic programmes (particularly in sixth forms) where vocational programmes in colleges or apprenticeships might provide better routes to success.

Weaknesses in the provision of Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) contribute to this position. Equally importantly, the Commission has found that the focus on promoting employability and skills is limited. The development of Employment and Skills Hubs linked to groups of schools and colleges has the potential to sharpen and enhance this focus

Leadership for a Self-Improving School System

The local authority has reviewed its role and reorganised services to support school improvement in 2011 and again in 2013, in response to national policy changes and the need for a reduction in local authority expenditure. The local authority now retains a small core school improvement function and a traded services offer, which includes continuing professional development, support for SEN and behaviour, and contracted services such as school meals. Arrangements for supporting school improvement are set out in a comprehensive and clear School Improvement Policy. There has been good impact in working with schools causing concern but it is not providing a sustainable framework for supporting the improvement of all secondary schools. It is our strongly held view that each secondary school in South Gloucestershire should work within a formal partnership arrangement with a group of other schools. The Commission does not have a preferred pattern of governance but that it should provide clear accountabilities, promote shared responsibilities and enable rapid improvement by reinforcing collaborative working between schools and sharing of the best resources. In some cases this will be through an academy framework. We would expect these partnerships to be a key focal point for taking forward the action to improve attainment and progress, to make better use of surplus capacity and rationalise post-16 provision.

Since its organisational changes in 2011 the local authority has sought to work with all schools in a way that recognises their autonomy but school leaders still perceive the leadership culture as too 'top down' and paternalistic. Our discussions suggest that there is now an opportunity for the local authority to build on good working relationships to work together with schools to create a more systematic framework for school improvement that is driven by schools themselves and for which schools, working collectively, are held to account. Evidence from similar developments nationally highlights the importance of shared commitment between school leaders, senior officers and elected members to drive the changes required. This will require different leadership behaviours and a planned programme of implementation to achieve the changes and improvements required.

Elected Members have a key leadership role to play: making difficult decisions in a timely way to reduce surplus secondary school places and tackle underperforming schools; meeting their statutory responsibilities for school improvement within a new framework of governance driven more directly by schools; and providing targeted funding to commission activities in support of key priorities for improvement. As a sign of its ambition and commitment to match resources to priorities, the local authority should allocate recurrent development funding for a period of three years to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

Recommendations

Improving Attainment and Progress for All

Recommendation 1

Schools and the local authority should define together and own South Gloucestershire's Performance Challenge, expressed in a new set of ambitious and stretching targets over the medium term for quality, attainment and progress, for which schools, working collaboratively, will be held to account.

Recommendation 2

Develop and invest in a systematic, needs-led, rigorous and sustained programme to improve the quality of teaching and the leadership of teaching, with an explicit strategic role for the Teaching School and drawing on the expertise of all schools, working in formal collaborative partnerships.

Recommendation 3

Develop a forensic approach towards the use of data in order to more effectively match provision and teaching to individualised learner needs

Recommendation 4

Improve continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools through the development of a Year 5-8 'learning pathway', focusing in particular on literacy, numeracy, and learner dispositions such as enterprise, problem solving and resilience.

Recommendation 5

Make more effective use of pupil feedback to reinforce high expectations and better inform curriculum planning, teaching methods, and personalised learning.

Recommendation 6

Drawing on resources including National Leaders of Governance (NLGs), improve the capacity of governors to properly challenge and hold school leaders to account for their performance

Improving the Quality of Provision – Learning for the Future

Recommendation 7

As a matter of urgency the local authority should initiate a process involving schools, colleges and other stakeholders to develop and carry through a plan to reduce surplus capacity and establish a more sustainable and innovative pattern of secondary and post-16 provision.

Recommendation 8

Develop and implement a modular post-16 curriculum offer across schools, college and work-based learning providers to maximise learner choice, complemented by impartial Information, Advice and Guidance.

Recommendation 9

The local authority needs to ensure that there is sufficient officer expertise and capacity to take a strategic lead in commissioning and developing the post-16 provision required, working closely with colleges and training providers.

Recommendation 10

Ensure that there is greater strategic engagement with employers and raise the profile of technical and employability skills in schools through the development of Employment and Skills Hubs.

Leadership for a Self-Improving System**Recommendation 11**

Develop a compelling and distinctive educational vision for South Gloucestershire that is shaped by schools, colleges, employers and the wider community.

Recommendation 12

Schools and the local authority should develop together a self-improving schools framework, based on formal collaborative partnerships between schools, with collective accountability for ambitious shared educational outcomes for the area

Recommendation 13

Establish a planned change programme to promote the different leadership behaviour required to move from current school improvement arrangements to a self-improving school system.

Recommendation 14

To support the setting up of the *South Gloucestershire Education Partnership* and the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, the local authority should allocate recurrent development funding to the South Gloucestershire Education Partnership Board for a period of three years.

Setting the Scene

Remit for the Commission

The **South Gloucestershire Education Commission** was set up by the local authority Children and Young People Committee in May 2013 with an overall remit to investigate and explore the model of secondary and post 16 educational provision in South Gloucestershire and the achievement of children and young people in South Gloucestershire schools, drawing together the findings into a report that could be used to inform future provision planning and school improvement approaches.

In establishing the Commission, the local authority acknowledged that the overall quality of provision was not good enough either at Key Stages 4 or 5 and educational standards were not as high as they should be. The local authority also expressed concerns as to whether the current model of secondary schooling (fifteen 11-18 secondary schools and one offering 4-18 education) was the most appropriate way to offer high quality education for children and young people in South Gloucestershire, particularly in the light of falling pupil numbers and impending national funding changes for schools.

The Commission's task was to consider these issues and explore imaginative solutions, engaging with local schools and a wide range of stakeholders. The full terms of reference for the Commission can be found on pages 41-42. We pulled together our key areas of investigation under the following themes:

- Improving attainment and progress
- Improving the quality of provision
- Leadership of change

The Commission has confined its focus to the effectiveness of support for school improvement and the overall quality of provision. As a result it has not considered in any detail the provision for supporting special educational needs or behaviour.

The Commission met four times between September and November 2013. For each session, commissioners considered briefing papers and gathered other information about education in South Gloucestershire through formal 'witness sessions' and visits to local secondary schools and colleges.

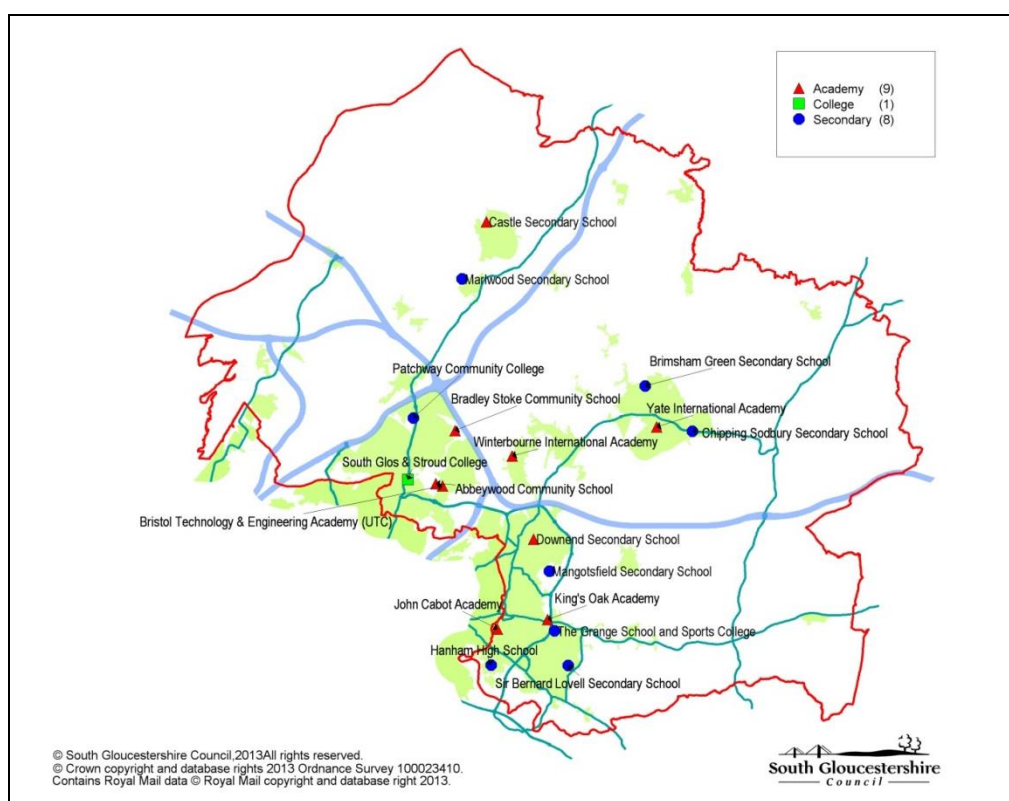
As part of the fourth meeting of the Commission, an externally facilitated 'Engagement Audit' event was held with secondary headteachers, governors and senior local authority officers and Elected Members, to explore in depth and record their views about key themes being investigated by the Commission. Each participant responded to a series of key questions in a live survey, the results of which were presented in graphs shown on screen at the meeting. Participants then completed extended written responses in workbooks that were then analysed in a summary report to the Commission.

The Commission also sought responses through a 'Call for Evidence' and drew on sample survey evidence from young people.

Education in South Gloucestershire

Secondary Schools and Post-16 Provision

There are sixteen secondary schools in South Gloucestershire. All schools are mixed. Fifteen of the schools are for the 11-18 age range and one offers 4-18 education. Eight schools have academy status and work in collaborative groupings as part of four academy federations. Schools work in consortium arrangements for post-16 learning. There are close links with South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, and City of Bristol College. The latter is a sponsor for a University Technical College (UTC) which opened in the area in September 2013. The map below shows the location of secondary schools and colleges in South Gloucestershire.



Funding of South Gloucestershire Secondary Schools

The local authority receives funding for schools through the Schools Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and this is transferred to schools through an Individual Schools Budget (ISB). A small element of the DSG is retained for central expenditure. The local authority has sought to maximise delegation of funding to schools and the level of core funding for school improvement in 2013/14 is £630,000. This represents £23 per pupil (0.6% of Schools Block DSG) for Local Authority (LA) maintained schools. South Gloucestershire is one of the lowest funded local authorities in England. At present its DSG Schools Block funding is £3,938.38 per pupil, placing it 150th out of 151 local authorities. In addition to the DSG funding the government introduced the Pupil Premium in 2011/12 to target support for disadvantaged pupils. The Pupil Premium in South Gloucestershire in 2013/14 totals £5.6m, of which £4.3m relates to LA maintained schools.

The low level of age-weighted pupil funding has been cited in evidence to the Commission as a key factor affecting attainment levels in South Gloucestershire secondary schools and a key leadership issue for the local authority. We have considered the validity of this assertion carefully in our analysis and set out our findings and a recommendation in the section on Leadership for a Self-Improving System.

Pupil Population

South Gloucestershire's secondary school population is 17,118. There is surplus of 16.6% against current capacity of secondary school places. A reduction in demand for secondary school places is expected to continue until 2015, with demand not rising to 2012 levels again until 2018, when surplus capacity will still be approximately 14%. New housing developments are likely to increase the demand for additional secondary school places in some areas after 2020. In the short to medium term the local authority is considering ways to rationalise the secondary school estate and ensure the sustainability of secondary schools.

Data from the January 2013 Pupil Census shows that there are relatively lower proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (7.9% in South Gloucestershire compared with 15.1% found nationally. BME pupils represent 7.9% of the pupil population (national 24.2%). Pupils with statements of special educational needs (2%) are in line with national figures (1.9%) whilst the proportion of pupils with special educational needs overall is significantly lower (12.4% in South Gloucestershire compared with 19% nationally). According to the most recent figures for children living in poverty (August 2011), the rate in South Gloucestershire is 11.3% compared with 20.1% nationally.

What the Performance Data Shows

The local authority has provided a wide range of performance information to the Commission about attainment and progress. The full list of data and briefings is provided in the details about the sessions of the Commission on pages 43-45.

Outcome of Ofsted Inspections

The following tables summarise OFSTED's overall effectiveness judgements for South Gloucestershire secondary schools up to 31st August 2013.

Good and Outstanding Schools – National, Regional, and South Gloucestershire data (OFSTED Data View August 31 st 2013)				
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ Requires Improvement	Inadequate
	%	%	%	%
South Gloucestershire	13	47	33	7
South West	21	50	24	5
England	23	48	24	5
Good and Outstanding Schools – Comparable Local Authorities (OFSTED Data View August 31 st 2013)				
%	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ Requires Improvement	Inadequate (Number of schools)
South Gloucestershire	13	47	33	7 (1)
Central Bedfordshire	13	55	29	3 (1)
Essex	22	47	27	4 (3)
Gloucestershire	22	38	30	11 (4)
Hampshire	18	56	21	6 (4)
Kent	29	50	19	2 (2)
Leicestershire	22	54	19	6 (3)
North Somerset	30	60	10	0
Poole	13	63	24	0
West Sussex	22	46	24	8 (3)
Worcestershire	21	58	21	0

The tables show that only one school in South Gloucestershire is judged to be inadequate. The local authority appears to have been effective in identifying schools causing concern and putting in place improvement. The main concern is that South Gloucestershire has a significantly lower proportion of secondary schools assessed as good or outstanding compared with the South West region and England as a whole. When considered alongside comparable local authorities (those designated by OFSTED as having similar socio-economic characteristics) South Gloucestershire has the smallest proportion of good and outstanding schools. A key issue is the extent to which the local authority's current arrangements for supporting secondary school improvement are making sufficient impact.

Key Stage 4 Attainment and Progress 2009-2013

Attainment at Key Stage 4 has improved 1% over the past four years. The table below shows that attainment in South Gloucestershire secondary schools has persistently remained below statistical neighbours and national levels. Within this static overall position there is a good deal of variability in the performance of a number of schools from one year to the next. More recently, there are encouraging signs of sustained improvement where some underperforming schools have worked in collaboration with more effective schools. Learning from what has worked in these schools points the way towards a more systematic approach across the local authority as a whole, based on more formal collaborative arrangements.

Key Stage 4 5+A*-C (inc Eng & Ma)	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (prov)	2012- 2013
South Gloucestershire	49	56	56	56	57	0
Statistical Neighbours' Average	53	56	59	59	61	2
National	51	55	58	59	60	2

Progress and Value Added

Pupils' rates of progress relative to their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 are lower than those found nationally and in statistical neighbours. Although the proportion of pupils making three levels of progress for English or Mathematics has improved over the past five years, the rate of improvement has either been below or kept pace with that seen in statistical neighbours and nationally.

English 3 levels progress	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (prov)	2012- 2013
South Gloucestershire	63	67	70	66	68	2
Statistical Neighbours' Average	68	72	74	69	71	2
National	65	69	72	68	71	3
Maths 3 levels progress	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (prov)	2012- 2013
South Gloucestershire	61	66	63	67	68	1
Statistical Neighbours' Average	62	65	68	71	73	2
National	58	62	65	69	72	3

Provisional value added measures for 2013 show six secondary schools in line with expectations, 10 significantly below and none above.

Value Added - South Glos Secondary Schools					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013(prov)
Significantly Above	1	2	1	1	0
In Line	7	7	8	7	6
Significantly Below	7	7	7	8	10

The most important factor identified in our analysis of current performance is that progress is significantly below expectation for pupils in all ability ranges and for key vulnerable groups. The relatively weak progress overall of pupils in South Gloucestershire secondary schools indicates the need for a robust focus on improving the quality of teaching so that all pupils are supported to meet and exceed expected progress from whatever starting point.

Key Stage 5

Attainment at Key Stage 5 in A and AS levels in secondary schools, as measured by points per entry, has remained static over the past three years and consistently below statistical neighbours and national levels.

A Level Points Per Entry	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (prov)	2013 - 2012
South Glos (excl SGS College)	193	198	201	201	201	0
SGS College (Filton College)	214	213	221	210	214	4
South Glos (inc SGS College)	200	203	207	204	206	2
Statistical Neighbours' Average	207	211	212	209	210	1
National	208	211	213	209	210	0

Post-16 Education, Employment and Training

The latest data shows a relatively low number of South Gloucestershire young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and an improving position since 2012. Destinations data indicates over 85% of young people in full-time education but relatively low numbers in work-based training.

	National Curriculum Years 12-14	October 2013	October 2012	October 2011
NEET	South Glos	4.8%	5.2%	5.6%
	Statistical Neighbours	5.3%	6.0%	7.0%
	England	5.0%	5.3%	5.9%
	* From 2012 the data is not compatible with preceding years as it is based on resident young persons			

Year 11 Leavers – South Gloucestershire						
	2010		2011		2012	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Young People in Year 12	1708	52.8	1535	46.6	1567	49.8
Young People in FE	1134	35.1	1341	40.7	1201	38.2
Young People in Employment with Training	53	1.6	49	1.5	44	1.4
Young People in Employment without Training	80	2.5	55	1.7	27	0.9
Young People in WBT	118	3.6	170	5.2	151	4.8
Young People NEET	91	2.8	98	3.0	74	2.4
Young People - Other	49	1.5	45	1.4	82	2.6
TOTAL	3233	100	3293	100	3146	100

The relatively weak attainment at Key Stage 5 and the low proportion of young people in vocational education or work-based training raise concerns about the effectiveness of individual school sixth forms and consortium arrangements, the appropriateness of the curriculum offer, and the quality of Information, Advice and Guidance to support young people in making decisions about their options post-16.

Progress Against Performance Targets

In published plans South Gloucestershire Council and its partners have set challenging targets for the attainment and progress of young people:

- 1. The proportion of young people achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics at age 16 is above the national average and in the top 25% of local authorities.**
- 2. Students in post-16 education and training are able to make an informed choice from a range of high quality provision and achieve excellence, leading to higher education or high quality employment.**
- 3. The educational performance of vulnerable children and young people, and those with additional needs, is in line with the performance of all children and young people.**
- 4. More able pupils achieve at least as well as their peers in similar local authorities.**

Source: Partnership Strategy for Children and Young People 2012-16

There is wide recognition that the current performance falls significantly short of these targets. The Commission considers that although there are some important foundations on which to build, and a number of promising developments underway, more fundamental change is required if these outcomes are to be realised.

A number of key priorities for change to respond to the current situation have emerged from the Commission's visits and discussions. We have brought these together in our main findings and recommendations, which are considered in detail under our three key themes.

Improving Attainment and Progress for All

Setting a South Gloucestershire Performance Challenge

The current targets for improving the attainment and progress of young people in South Gloucestershire are specified in a 'golden thread' of partnership and corporate plans: the Sustainable Community Strategy to 2026; the Council Strategy; the Partnership Strategy for Children and Young People 2012-16; and the School Improvement Policy 2013. They were devised within a planning framework which was remote from schools and unsuited to the new policy context in which schools and local authorities would need to work following the Schools White Paper in 2010.

Evidence to the Commission indicates that these area-wide targets are not owned collectively by schools and do not drive their individual improvement plans. The targets themselves do not define clearly enough the 'step change' in rates of improvement required. Our analysis of current performance suggests that strategies for improving attainment and progress must be predicated on the basis that all schools in South Gloucestershire will need to contribute, whatever their current level of attainment or rating for effectiveness by OFSTED and that the focus will need to be on accelerating rates of progress from starting points so that a greater proportion of pupils not only meet but exceed expected progress.

Recommendation 1

Schools and the local authority should define together and own South Gloucestershire's Performance Challenge, expressed in a new set of ambitious and stretching targets over the medium term for quality, attainment and progress, for which schools, working collaboratively, will be held to account.

Respondents to the Commission have put forward a number of reasons for the current under performance in secondary schools. Some have emphasised concerns about a tradition of low aspiration from parents and the wider community. Others have emphasised the challenges of working with some Bristol-resident pupils from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. We accept that these factors have some relevance but our view is that the main focus for improving attainment and progress in South Gloucestershire should be on the fundamentals of school improvement, particularly improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Improving the impact of local authority support for school improvement

The local authority's capacity for supporting school improvement was significantly reduced in April 2011. A small central team was retained to deliver statutory responsibilities and commission continued challenge and support for schools. A number of school improvement functions were transferred to the council's Traded and Support Services, enabling schools to choose what they purchased and identify

new requirements. These changes reflected an interpretation of the policy context that was prevalent in many local authorities at that time.

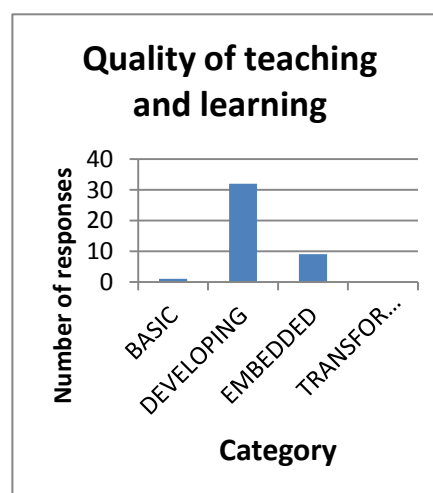
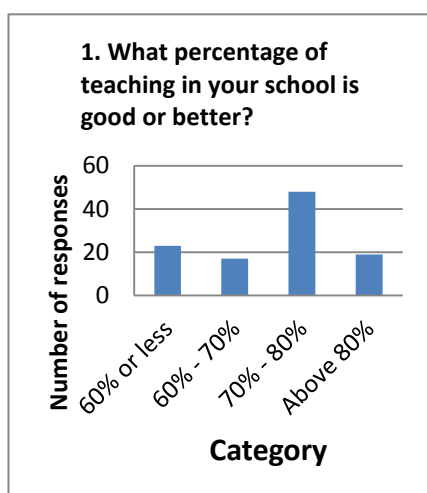
The council's approach was set out in its School Improvement Policy, which provided a clear framework for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention, and provision of differentiated support for school improvement. Under these arrangements the local authority has been effective in identifying and supporting schools causing concern, making good use of formal partnerships with more successful schools and brokering a wide range of timely and appropriate support. Beyond the support for schools causing concern, the local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement have made insufficient impact in improving attainment and progress for all young people or in the drive for all secondary schools in South Gloucestershire to be good or outstanding.

The School Improvement Policy was revised and updated in November 2013. It identified a number of key changes designed to respond to continuing concerns about underperformance in South Gloucestershire secondary schools. Most notable changes were the strengthening of the School Improvement Adviser programme; targeted support for schools assessed by OFSTED as requiring improvement; strategic deployment of National and Local Leaders of Education; and making greater use of school to school support.

It is too early to see the impact of these changes. These are developments which could be incorporated into a more sustainable framework for supporting the improvement of all schools. This is considered later in our recommendations about a different way for the local authority and schools to work together.

Improving the quality and leadership of teaching

Establishing a more effective strategic approach to improving the quality of teaching across all schools has been identified as a top priority. The quality of teaching and learning needs to improve in all key stages if pupils are to make expected and more than expected progress. Evidence from the Commission's Engagement Audit shows that the majority of school leaders assessed the proportion of good or better teaching in their school as below 80%. Most respondents considered their teaching and learning to be at a developmental level (maximising the best of their current practice) and none defined it as transformational (taking a radical and innovative approach).



SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

Key issues to address in relation to the quality of teaching include: improving consistency and tackling in-school variation; improving teaching in the core subjects; and effective approaches to improve the progress of vulnerable groups of pupils and the most able. With limited staff turnover and recruitment difficulties for certain key subjects, there is recognition of the need for a strong focus on pedagogy to make the most of the current teacher workforce in South Gloucestershire.

In that regard the current support for improving the quality of teaching is fragmented and not systematic enough. The programme of continuing professional development offered through Traded and Support Services is considered to be insufficiently needs-led. Best Practice Fora are variable in their quality and focus. Take up for middle leadership development through the programme is reported to be relatively low. The accreditation and deployment of System Leaders in Education (SLEs) is more limited than is found in some local authorities. The support from Cabot Learning Federation's contribution as a National Teaching School is not being used to its full potential. There are good examples of schools working in collaboration to improve teaching and learning through peer to peer coaching as part of formal partnerships but the systematic use of best practice and expertise across all secondary schools is recognised as a key area for development

Recommendation 2

Develop and invest in a systematic, needs-led, rigorous and sustained programme to improve the quality of teaching and the leadership of teaching, with an explicit strategic role for the Teaching School and drawing on the expertise of all schools, working in formal collaborative partnerships.

Provision, support for, and use of performance data

School leaders and governors are provided with high quality and timely performance data. The provision of data and support for its use is highly valued. Data appears to be increasingly well-used at a strategic level by the local authority, governing bodies and school leaders. Its use to enable teachers to match work to pupils' prior attainment and to inform the design of the curriculum is an area for improvement.

Recommendation 3

Develop a forensic approach towards the use of data in order to more effectively match provision and teaching to individualised learner needs

Curriculum design

There is clear recognition of the need to think differently about the design and delivery of the curriculum, particularly in anticipating the changes to the national curriculum and associated changes to assessment and accountability. Evidence to the Commission has particularly emphasised the need to focus on continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools, particularly in relation to pedagogy. Primary school leaders also highlighted a concern that teacher expectations for pupils in Year 7 were often too low and learning tasks did not build sufficiently on children's prior achievements. They felt that secondary schools also needed to make explicit provision for the development of effective learner dispositions (for example, resilience). Where primary and secondary schools had

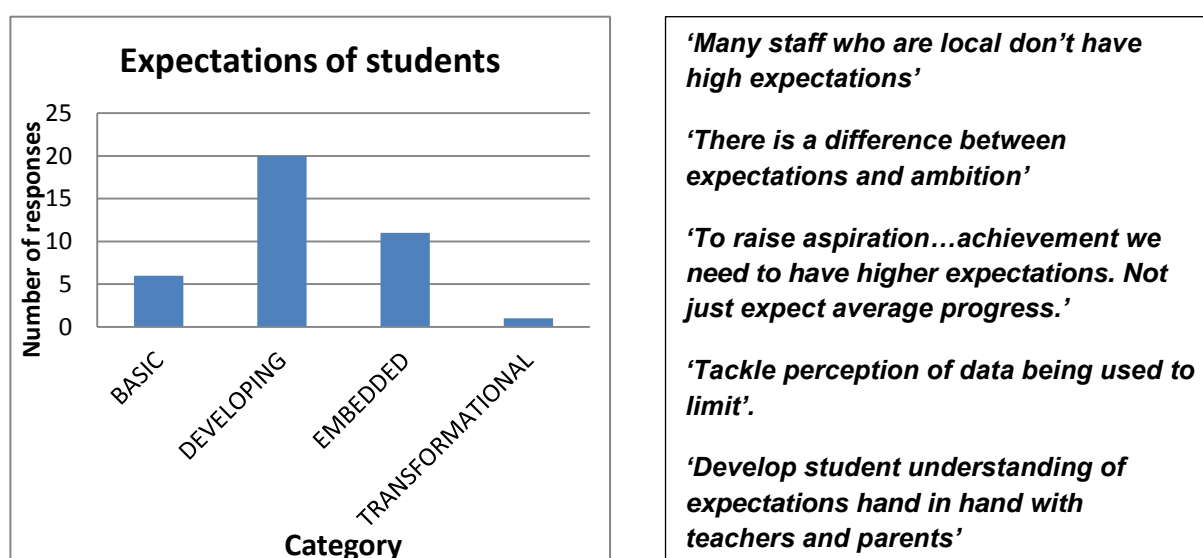
worked together to improve continuity in the curriculum this had been through local initiative rather than an area-wide approach.

Recommendation 4

Improve continuity and progression between primary and secondary schools through the development of a Year 5-8 'learning pathway', focusing in particular on literacy, numeracy, and learner dispositions such as enterprise, problem solving and resilience.

Engaging Pupils and Raising Expectations

Evidence to the commission from pupils highlights the importance they place on the quality of dialogue with and feedback from teachers about their learning goals and what they need to do improve their learning. Such dialogue is an important way in which teachers can raise expectations of their pupils and engage them effectively in their learning. The lack of high expectations from teachers has come through as a key area of concern in the responses to the Call for Evidence and is reinforced in the Commission's Engagement Audit evidence.



SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

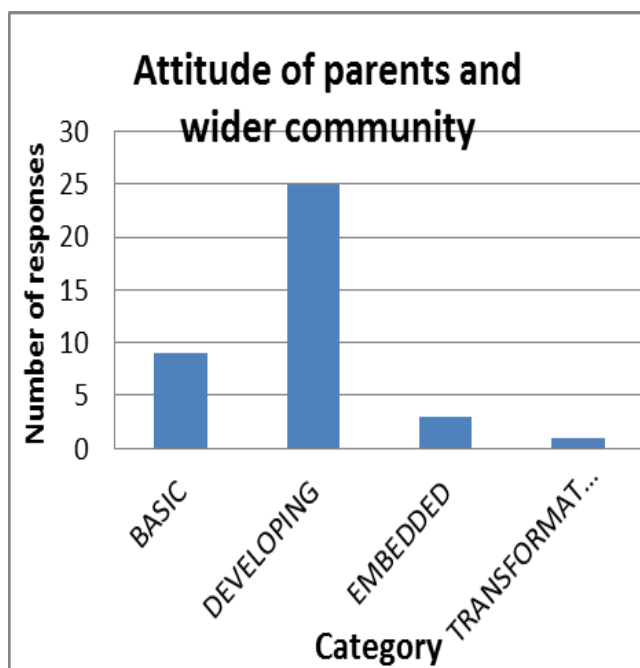
Commissioners saw examples of schools that made good use of pupil feedback to reinforce high expectations, improve curriculum planning and better pedagogy. These approaches should be adopted more widely, learning from best practice and the transformational work in found in some South Gloucestershire schools.

Recommendation 5

Make more effective use of pupil feedback to reinforce high expectations and better inform curriculum planning, teaching methods, and personalised learning.

Engaging the Community

The lack of aspiration in the wider community in South Gloucestershire has been highlighted as a key concern from many respondents to the Commission. A particular concern is that parents do not recognise the importance of educational attainment and employability skills for young people in the area to access the opportunities in high growth sectors such as aerospace, advanced engineering, defence and microelectronics, all of which are based in South Gloucestershire.



'Historically, those living in the area have experienced relative prosperity despite low levels of academic achievement. Education has not been seen as transformative for many families.'

'train parents to expect children to fill the skills gaps (and get new high level jobs)'

'Seek new ways to engage, involve and seek feedback and participation from parents. Open access monthly parent consultations which can be booked on line have made a big difference'

'Consider a different support structure that creates capacity for the school to better support parents and enable aspirations to be realised'

SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

As in other aspects of secondary education in South Gloucestershire that the Commission has examined, there are examples of transformational initiatives and embedded best practice in engaging the community from which schools can learn.

Improving Leadership and Governance

Support for highly effective leadership and management in schools has already been identified by the local authority and secondary headteachers as an area for development. The Commission understands that a programme of leadership development is being jointly commissioned with the London Leadership Strategy and we endorse this important development.

Governance is assessed by OFSTED as good or better in 69% of schools. The local authority has been effective in tackling weaknesses in governance in schools causing concern, making good use of National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) and powers to appoint additional governors. A framework for the review of governance has been developed for use with schools following a grade 3 OFSTED judgement.

Support for governance is available through training programmes offered by Traded and Support Services with varying levels of take-up by the 12 subscribing schools.

Opportunities for shared learning are also provided through a Bi-Annual Governors Conference open to all governors. A new facilitated self-evaluation toolkit for governors is available and the local authority reports positive feedback from those governing bodies that have used it.

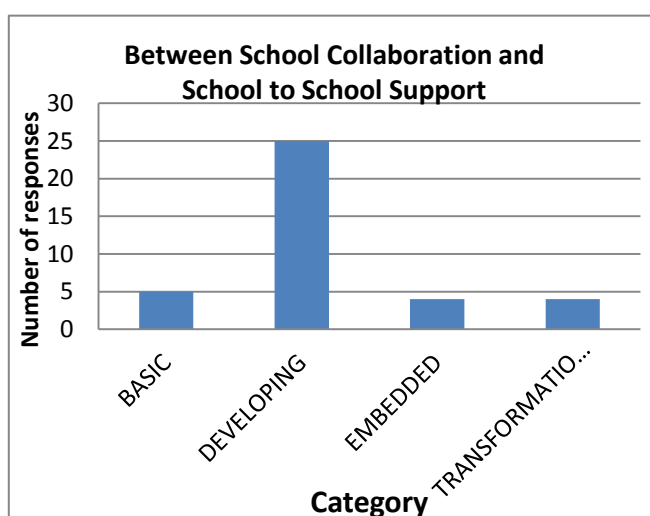
The Commission considers that there needs to be a stronger emphasis from the local authority and schools on developing the capacity for governors to provide more effective challenge. This is a key aspect of a self-improving school system.

Recommendation 6

Drawing on resources including NLGs improve the capacity of governors to properly challenge and hold school leaders to account for their performance

School to School Support

The commission found increasing evidence of schools working collaboratively to address aspects of school improvement. In the Commission's Engagement Audit collaborative working was seen as the way ahead to improve attainment and progress. Most respondents assessed collaborative working between schools and school to school support as 'developing' but there was also the potential to learn from schools where collaboration was having a transformational impact. Often this was within a formal partnership structure with the associated accountability.



'Refine and develop training, peer to peer support and planning between schools'

'Create structured partnerships to ensure that there is a strong framework to ensure sustainability'

'Look at mechanisms to broker since LA can no longer provide this structure.'

SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

The Commission considers that the extension of formal partnership arrangements is required to provide the necessary framework for a more systematic approach to improving attainment and progress. In particular this would facilitate, for example, the identification and sharing of best practice, the accreditation of local expertise to support the Leadership of teaching, peer to peer coaching and joint development programmes to address shared key priorities in improving the quality of teaching and learning. See the recommendations in the section of our report on 'Leadership for a Self-Improving System'.

Improving the Quality of Provision – Learning for the Future

Surplus Secondary School Places – Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The number of surplus places in South Gloucestershire secondary schools is too high and is a key factor affecting the quality of education and the opportunities for young people post-16. The impact of increasing surplus capacity is a significant contributory factor in the underperformance of secondary schools in South Gloucestershire. This is highlighted in the 'Call for Evidence' submission to the Commission from secondary headteachers:

'Demographic issues have caused considerable difficulties for some schools in recent years, with the recruitment of students, the management of staffing reductions, and the maintenance of a broad curriculum all presenting significant challenges

Surplus capacity is a significant issue in the area. Of 16 secondary schools, only 3 are consistently full. Surplus capacity leads to budgetary pressures, constraining the resources available for educational provision, and reducing substantially the freedom that Headteachers have in the recruitment and retention of staff. The critical importance of recruitment in this context can result in competition rather than collaboration between schools.

Schools have been torn between collaboration and competition, especially those in urban areas, exacerbated in recent years by demographic pressures...

Source: Secondary Headteachers' Call for Evidence Submission

The local authority's 'Draft Commissioning of Places Policy 2011-16' indicates that surplus capacity in secondary schools is projected to rise to 20% by 2015. A marginal rise in secondary pupil numbers is forecast from 2019. However the full effect of the projected increase by 6,000 in the number of 0-19 year olds in South Gloucestershire will not be felt in secondary schools until 2027. In its draft policy the local authority sets out its strategic approach:

'As a commissioner of places the Council will facilitate, enable and monitor provision of the highest quality, with schools and academies accessible to local communities within a rationally organised infrastructure. This will require a flexible strategic approach which is responsive to local developments and partnership working with individual schools of whatever legal status'.

Source: Draft Commissioning of Places Policy 2011-16

The Commission considers that this incremental approach lacks sufficient urgency and ambition, and misses the opportunity to integrate action to improve educational achievement and the quality of provision.

Rationalising Post-16 Provision

Post-16 provision in secondary schools under current arrangements is not delivering high enough attainment or meeting the needs of the full range of learners sufficiently. Although the breadth of the academic curriculum has been maintained and, to an extent, enhanced, current provision is not making best use of resources.

Improving the effectiveness of post-16 provision has been a key focus for the local authority for a decade. In 2010 the local authority commissioned an external review by Northern Education: *'South Gloucestershire Post-16 Review: Variations in Consistency'*. It considered possible options **'with regard to the future post-16 infrastructure'** with a recommendation to **'streamline the existing pattern with all schools as active members of either the Kingswood or the Concorde Partnership and rationalisation of provision based on partnerships' own strategic planning.** As well as recommending the strengthening of consortium working, the review highlighted a number of key areas for improvement, including strengthening the role and impact of the 14-19 Partnership Board.

We have found evidence of a considerable amount of partnership activity in the intervening years with some partnerships successfully improving aspects of provision. However our assessment is that progress overall since the external review has been limited and many of the weaknesses pinpointed in 2010 remain. The local authority's submission to the Commission highlights the continuing key challenges:

Key Challenges – Post 16 Secondary School Provision

- **Too many leaders** – variable strategic accountability. Decision making fragmented; accountability systems do not impact on quality; funding driven.
- Current provision offers poor value for money – over duplication of academic level 3 courses, very small class sizes common feature A2/Year 13 even where partnership working is in place. Infrastructure and use of resource does not adequately meet the needs of students, particularly for some of the more vulnerable students.
- **Curriculum planning does not meet learners needs** – limited or no offer Foundation level and level 2 courses in some areas – most vulnerable students travelling or not sustaining participation.
- **Very limited transfer of knowledge between schools and college.** LA has taken strategic role summer 2013 – data sharing agreement in place with key Post 16 providers so that transfer of knowledge such as Risk of NEET indicators (RONI) and GCSE results are shared.
- **Partnership working is complex and creates too many pressures:**
 - Accountability systems have not addressed poor performance
 - Tracking and monitoring of student progress is more complex and less responsive
 - Differences in leadership and management structures, coupled with inconsistent subject level leadership
 - Post 16 timetabling decisions impact negatively on Key Stage 3 timetabling
 - Transport arrangements reduce time in lessons

Source: Commission Session 2 – Paper 3 'Post-16 Challenges and Solutions'

The submission from secondary headteachers also recognises that **'the 16-18 partnerships are now facing considerable challenges in light of a rapidly changing curriculum, accountability framework and funding context'** and that schools **'are not in a position to cater for all 16-18 students.'** Nevertheless secondary headteachers continue to rehearse the arguments about the importance

of maintaining 11-18 provision because of its impact on school ethos, recruitment and retention of teachers, continuity for students, and attractiveness for aspirational parents. A 'mixed economy' of 11-16 and 11-18 schools is considered to be ***'disadvantageous to those schools without a Sixth Form, especially as it would be the strongest schools who were best placed to retain their Sixth Form provision'***. They conclude that ***'all partnerships will need to evolve, but this might be achieved in different ways, including collaboration, federation, cross-site Post-16 centres, and single-site Post-16 centres'***.

The Commission considers that the current model of post-16 partnerships has run its course and is unlikely to deliver the scale of change needed. Secondary schools working in formal partnership arrangements, with clear governance and accountability, are more likely to have the capacity to address the key challenges and take the difficult decisions to reduce surplus secondary school place and rationalise post-16 provision.

Recommendation 7

As a matter of urgency the local authority should initiate a process involving schools, colleges and other stakeholders to develop and carry through a plan to reduce surplus capacity and establish a more sustainable and innovative pattern of secondary and post-16 provision. This needs to happen rapidly with agreed reduction targets and implementation dates.

The rationalisation of post-16 provision must include a strategic review of the curriculum offer across schools, colleges and work-based learning providers:

- removing duplication,
- addressing gaps,
- and ensuring a better match of the curriculum to the needs of all students.

Notable areas for review are:

- the sufficiency of Foundation and Level 2 programmes;
- the cost-effective alternative provision for pupils in Year 10 and 11 at risk of becoming NEET, with progression into work-based training;
- the provision of flexible programmes that combine re-sits for GCSE English and mathematics with vocational programmes and employability skills

The review needs to take account of specialist vocational provision across the sub-region. A modular approach across all institutions would also promote flexibility and maximise learner choice.

A key underpinning of learner choice is access to rigorous and impartial Information, Advice and Guidance. A wide range of respondents have expressed the view to the Commission that provision in South Gloucestershire more often than not falls short of this requirement. Schools have collaborated well to develop the impressive *'Ambitions'* annual careers information event. In a recent initiative some post-16 partnerships have contracted with South Gloucestershire and Stroud College for IAG provision. The ideal however would be a model independent from schools and Colleges in the area. Beyond these developments, arrangements in schools appear to be fragmented and inconsistent with the result that young people are not

considering the full range of options open to them to meet their learning or employment goals.

Recommendation 8

Develop and implement a modular post-16 curriculum offer across schools, college and work-based learning providers to maximise learner choice, complemented by impartial Information, Advice and Guidance.

The curriculum offer for post-16 learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) must be significantly improved. Sub-regional commissioning priorities identified in 2011 are at an early stage of implementation owing to delays in the transfer of strategic responsibility and funding from the Education Funding Agency to the local authority until 2013/14. Immediate priorities have been to improve support for transition to college and encourage the direction of funding to develop an appropriate curriculum offer rather than into enhanced non-educational adult support. Currently the local authority lacks capacity to take a strategic lead in this key area of work. The authority should identify an excellent provider and work in partnership on both provision and funding.

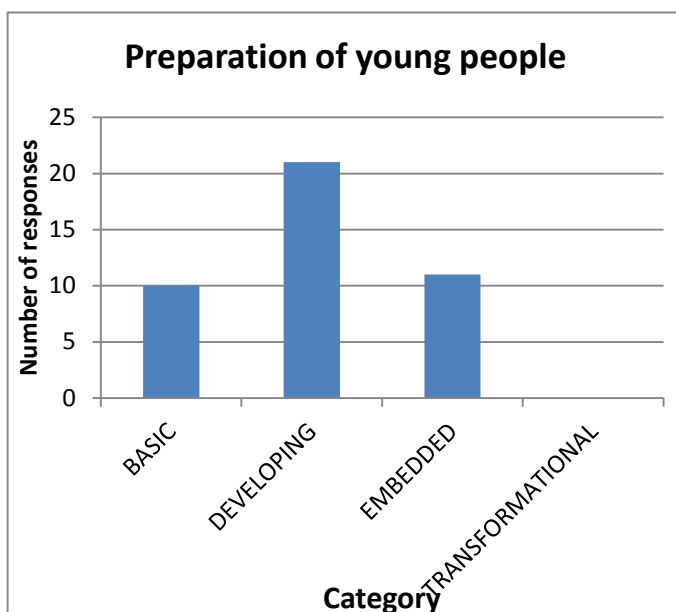
Recommendation 9

The local authority needs to ensure that there is sufficient officer expertise and capacity to take a strategic lead in commissioning and developing the post-16 provision required, working closely with colleges and training providers.

Promoting Employability and Skills

The focus on promoting employability and skills in schools is underdeveloped. Young people need a better understanding of the full range of further education and training opportunities and information about local employer needs. Evidence presented to the Commission suggests that there is a significant mismatch between young people's career aspirations and the reality of the local labour market. This mismatch is reflected in the take-up of post-16 educational provision which is centred too strongly on academic qualifications at level 3 rather than the comparable vocational provision at the same level. This vocational level 3 provision would be more appropriate for the likely opportunities at technician level in the local economy. Opportunities for young people to develop and build the skills and qualities needed for the workplace are not promoted consistently across all schools.

The need to address these concerns is highlighted in evidence from the local authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership, and is recognised by school leaders in their response to the Commission's Engagement Audit. In our visits to schools we saw examples of embedded best practice from which other schools could learn.



'a real challenge planning how to deliver skills for the new curriculum, and qualifications framework while having to deliver employability shifts'

'develop links beyond the 'Interview' day to acquire skills'

'Not enough access to different work environments. Lack of credible IAG. School is full of teachers few of which [sic] have worked in other fields. However performed skills development is good'

SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

The submission from secondary headteachers highlights the need to create the capacity in schools to build links with employers.

'Schools and businesses want to work together to address shared priorities such as the development of literacy, numeracy and other core skills, career pathways and employability – but there are few opportunities to do so and neither schools nor businesses have the capacity needed to develop this further without central co-ordination.'

Source: Secondary Headteachers' Call for Evidence Submission

One way in which the necessary capacity could be developed would be through the implementation of Employment and Skills Hubs (ESHs). The role of ESHs was outlined in evidence to the Commission and we consider that this should be given serious consideration as means to promote employability in schools. The extract below sets out a possible specification for Employment and Skills Hubs.

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS HUB SPECIFICATION

The Hub would be the conduit for all activity related to employment and skills, and its purpose would be to focus on the following objectives:

- *To establish a ladder of learning opportunities for all children and young people aged 10-19, in collaboration with local employers*
- *To maximise initiatives which promote employer engagement and to establish effective education/business partnerships*
- *To provide high quality, relevant and accessible labour market intelligence and information*
- *To make available face-to-face guidance for all pupils*
- *To work with parents to raise awareness about career progression routes and to challenge stereotypes*
- *To successfully engage with the most vulnerable young people and tailor their experience so that they can enter into sustained employment*
- *To establish and train an Enterprise and Employment Champion in every school*
- *To embed enterprise skills into schools*
- *To improve employment skills to include soft skills (behaviour and attributes)*
- *To encourage more young entrepreneurs and business start-ups*
- *To ensure children in Key Stage 2 engage with work related learning activities before transition into secondary phase*
- *To provide a platform for Sector Specific Career Progression Advisers and Career Development Expert Advisers to work with young people*

Source: Commission Session 3 – Paper 3 ‘Aspirations Briefing Note’

Recommendation 10

Ensure that there is greater strategic engagement with employers and raise the profile of technical and employability skills in schools through the development of Employment and Skills Hubs, working closely with the LEP.

Leadership for a Self-Improving System

Wicked Problems – Collaborative Solutions

The Commission has identified the educational challenges facing schools the local authority in South Gloucestershire. It has also considered the leadership approach by the local authority and schools that would be most effective in responding to them. The challenges are:

- improving the attainment and progress of all pupils at Key Stages 4 and 5;
- reducing the high number of surplus places in secondary schools;
- improving the quality of post-16 provision.

We have characterised these challenges as ‘wicked problems’.¹

CRITICAL, TAME AND WICKED PROBLEMS

- **Critical Problems** – crisis situations that require an immediate response
- **Tame Problems** – complex but resolvable through management processes and technical solutions
- **Wicked Problems** – no clear relationship of cause and effect, cross more than one organisation, require adjustments in behaviour and attitudes of organisations, resolution requires collaboration

We consider that, to date, the local authority’s response to these challenges has assumed that good working relationships with schools and conventional management processes will be sufficient. For example, under the current *School Improvement Policy* and the *Draft Commissioning of Places Policy 2012-16* the local authority’s approach tends to be procedural and incremental, working within the limitations of statutory responsibilities. This approach has not worked in the past, for example in implementing the *South Gloucestershire Post-16 Review*, and in our view is not likely to be effective in the future. A more bold approach is needed, working with schools and other partners in a formal framework of collaboration at two levels:

- between the local authority, schools and other partners;
- between secondary schools working together in formal partnership arrangements

This will require the local authority to take a different leadership role, working with schools as an enabler in creating a more systematic framework for school improvement, particularly concentrating on the quality of teaching and learning. This framework should be driven by schools themselves and schools should collectively be held to account for its successful operation. Schools will also need to learn from the experience of collaborative working. There are recent examples of effective partnerships between schools in South Gloucestershire under an academy framework. Equally, some partnerships have not always faced up to difficult key

¹ ‘Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: The Role of Leadership’ Keith Grint (2008)

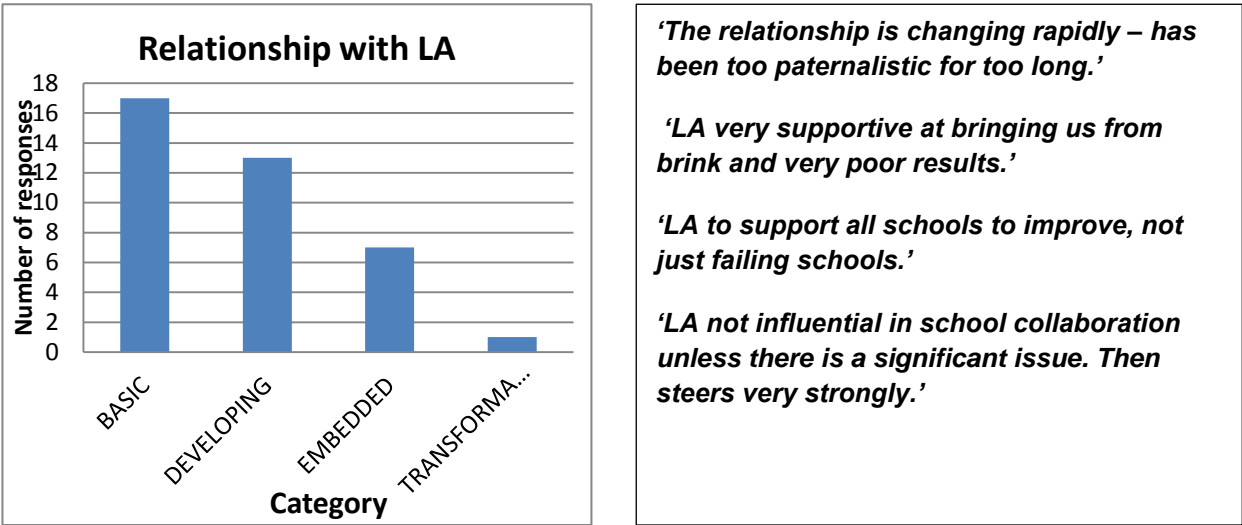
issues or delivered the necessary improvements. For everyone involved, this collaborative working will mean different leadership behaviours.

The following sections set out our thoughts about a different leadership role for the local authority, building on the changes since 2011. In this we assess the implications for school funding and the investment needed from the local authority to enable the changes we are recommending. We consider how collaborative working between secondary schools can be extended and formalised to ensure greater impact. We draw in particular on recent successful experience of partnerships between schools in South Gloucestershire and the lessons learned from post-16 consortia. Finally, we outline a developmental framework for a self-improving school system in South Gloucestershire, with associated governance and accountability – and the remit to take forward the key recommendations from our report.

The Local Authority’s Leadership Role

Since its organisational changes in 2011 the local authority has sought to work with all schools in a way that recognises their autonomy, whilst maintaining the local authority’s statutory responsibilities for school improvement and as the champion for vulnerable pupils. The *School Improvement Policy* sets out important principles for the local authority’s work with schools and specifies clear procedures for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. Challenge, support, and the deployment of core school improvement expertise are differentiated according to the needs of individual schools. Protocols for working with academy schools have been agreed. Working relationships with academy schools are good and the resources from academy schools have been used well to support schools causing concern.

In spite of these developments, some respondents to the Commission’s Engagement Audit assessed their relationship with the local authority as at a ‘basic level’ (i.e. based on short term strategies to respond to immediate requirements in improving attainment and progress). This assessment probably reflects the local authority’s strong focus on support for schools causing concern. However it also accords with a perception of some that the local authority’s support for school improvement has concentrated too much on short term strategies.



SOURCE: South Gloucestershire Education Commission ENGAGEMENT AUDIT REPORT

A minority of comments were positive about recent changes in approach and optimistic that schools and the local authority could work differently together in future – a theme which is highlighted clearly in the secondary headteachers' Call for Evidence Submission.

The following developments would in our view make a further substantial impact on school standards...

- ***A long-term strategy shared by schools, academies and the LA that is developed collectively and based on common priorities.***
- ***A coherent set of formal arrangements between schools, to develop leadership capacity and improve the quality of teaching & learning for schools individually and collectively...***
- ***A needs-led model for LA Traded Services***

Source: Secondary Headteachers' Call for Evidence Submission

It is clear from the Engagement Audit, and from the secondary headteachers' Call for Evidence submission that school leaders are looking for the local authority to engage with schools to develop a new strategic framework for supporting school improvement. This would include more systematic school to school support to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and a more responsive traded services offer.

School Funding

The low level of age-weighted pupil funding has been cited in evidence to the Commission as a key factor affecting attainment levels in South Gloucestershire secondary schools and a leadership issue for the local authority. We have considered the validity of this assertion carefully in our analysis.

To investigate whether the level of school funding was a key factor the Commission conducted a financial benchmarking exercise for a sample of four South Gloucestershire schools. It used the 'Similar Schools' model from the DfE Performance Tables in order to control for prior attainment and to compare funding with outcomes. We concluded that there does not seem to be a relationship between the total per pupil income and the 5+ A*-C including English and Mathematics figures when examined on a school by school basis for the four sample schools. This finding confirms previous research on this topic. For example two of the four sample schools achieved much higher results than their comparator group despite receiving lower funding, whilst the two other sample schools had lower results than their similar schools group. What is very clear is that for schools with similar prior attainment low funded schools can often outperform higher funded schools and vice versa. This finding indicates that other factors may be more important in determining the success of a school than funding alone.

The Commission is thus not minded to recommend a change in the level of age-weighted pupil funding. However, we do consider that the local authority should allocate development funding to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

Collaborative Partnerships of Secondary Schools

The Commission has concluded that the establishment of formal partnership arrangements between secondary schools is a key requirement if the main educational challenges for South Gloucestershire secondary schools are to be addressed. The need for more extensive and systematic collaborative arrangements between schools was raised as a key priority by school leaders during our visits to schools, in the witness sessions, and through formal submissions in the Call for Evidence. Although there is agreement between headteachers and governors about the need to extend collaborative working, there are different opinions about the nature of governance and the degree of formality required. Witnesses to the Commission stressed the importance of formal partnership arrangements with clear governance and accountability. The secondary headteachers' Call for Evidence submission suggests this is an unresolved issue:

'Schools are generally open to the concept of more formal partnerships as a vehicle for raising standards. However, many school communities have a strong desire to maintain their autonomy and individual identities, and the extension of academy groups is only feasible if the strongest schools are in a position to support a larger number of vulnerable schools.'

Source: Secondary Headteachers' Call for Evidence Submission

The Commission has given these points extended consideration and it is our strongly held view that each secondary school in South Gloucestershire should work within a formal partnership arrangement with a group of other schools. The Commission does not have a preferred pattern of governance. However it is clear that any governance arrangements should provide clear accountabilities, promote shared responsibilities and enable rapid improvement by reinforcing collaborative working between schools and sharing of the best resources. In some cases this will be through an academy framework. We would expect these partnerships to be a key focal point for taking forward the action to improve the quality of teaching and learning, as well as addressing wider strategic issues such as reducing surplus capacity and post-16 rationalisation.

Recommendation 11

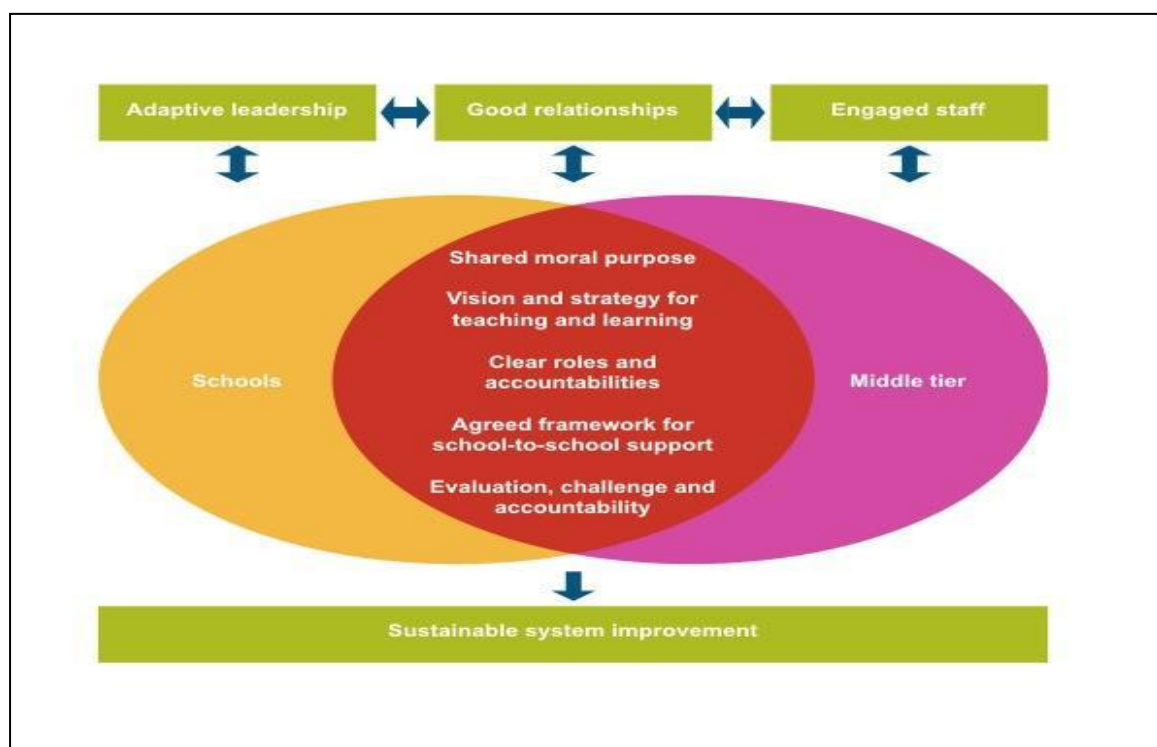
Develop a compelling and distinctive educational vision for South Gloucestershire that is shaped by schools, colleges, employers and the wider community.

Recommendation 12

Schools and the local authority should develop together a self-improving schools framework, based on formal collaborative partnerships between schools, with collective accountability for ambitious shared educational outcomes for the area

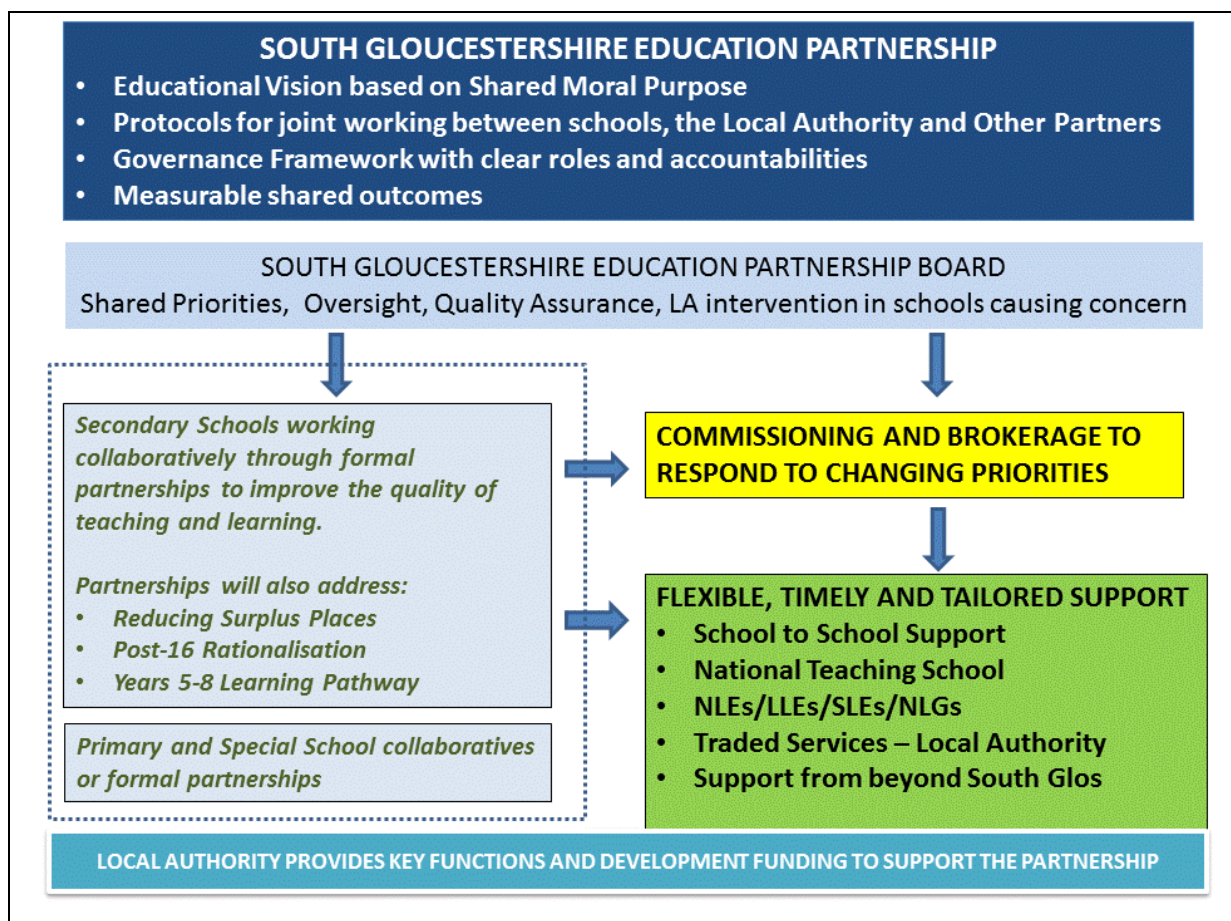
A Framework for the Future

In taking forward a new framework for supporting school improvement, South Gloucestershire can draw on the learning from a number of leading edge local authorities. Recent research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) highlights the key characteristics of school improvement arrangements where school to school support is a key feature.² The important message from this research is that school to school support does not, of itself, drive improvement in attainment and progress. It is most effective when it takes place in a context of shared vision, clarity of roles and accountabilities and where the core purpose is focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The Commission recommends the model below as a template for the implementation of a self-improving school system in Gloucestershire.



Drawing on the template from the NFER report we have outlined a framework for a self-improving school system in South Gloucestershire, which would be known as the *South Gloucestershire Education Partnership*.

² 'What Works in Enabling School Improvement? The Role of the Middle Tier', NFER April 2013



Key elements of a *South Gloucestershire Education Partnership*

1. The work of the partnership would be in the context of the South Gloucestershire Education Challenge, with its effectiveness assessed against measureable outcomes.
2. Schools, the local authority, and key partners, would sign up to an Education Partnership Agreement
3. The Education Partnership Board would be jointly governed by schools, the local authority and other partners. The Board would oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the Commission. It would be held to account by the Children and Young People Committee.
4. Formal partnerships between secondary schools would be established and would address the Commission's key issues through their partnerships, especially the key priority to improve teaching and the leadership of teaching.
5. Flexible timely and tailored support to respond to schools' areas for development would be developed, drawing increasingly on the resources and expertise of other schools.
6. The Partnership Board would establish commissioning and brokerage capacity to develop a directory of best practice in schools. It would enable new support services to be commissioned in response to changing need.
7. The local authority would retain key statutory school improvement functions and provide enabling support for the partnership.
8. The Partnership Board would receive recurrent development funding from the local authority to establish the new arrangements, for three years.

Evidence from similar developments nationally highlights the importance of alignment between school leaders, senior officers and elected members to ensure that the impact of their work together is translated into better learning experiences and improved educational outcomes for pupils. This requires different leadership behaviours and a planned programme of implementation to achieve the changes and improvements required.

Recommendation 13

Establish a planned change programme to promote the different leadership behaviour required to move from current school improvement arrangements to a self-improving school system.

Recommendation 14

To support the setting up of the *South Gloucestershire Education Partnership* and the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, the local authority should allocate recurrent development funding to the South Gloucestershire Education Partnership Board for a period of three years.

Further Information

Call for Evidence Summary

The Call for Evidence opened in mid-September and was closed for responses from mid-November. It was publicised through the council website and specific groups were encouraged to respond. Members of the public were able to either fill in the online form, or download a paper form to submit. A sample of pupils responded to an allied set of questions.

The call for evidence comprised the following questions:

- 1a What do you think are the causes of underachievement for children and young people in secondary schools in South Gloucestershire?
- 1b What do you think could be done to raise standards in the secondary schools in South Gloucestershire?
- 1c How should the council support and challenge secondary schools to improve and achieve excellence?
- 2a Does the current organisation of 11-16 and 16-18 education meet the needs of children and young people in South Gloucestershire and promote high standards?
- 2b How should schools work together to challenge each other and share their best practice? Have you seen good examples of this happening already?
- 3 What could employers, schools and colleges do together to ensure children and young people get these skills?
- 4 How can all of South Gloucestershire's residents participate in and support children and young people's learning?
- 5 Do you have any other comments or suggestions relating to the work of the commission?

Twenty-three responses were received from individuals and a collective response was received from the heads of secondary schools in South Gloucestershire and from a cluster of primary and secondary schools.

Information has been brought together under the four main themes outlined below, with several sub-categories. Common threads have been identified within these themes and summarised below.

Key themes include:

- Lack of aspiration in South Gloucestershire
- Improve quality of teaching
- Improve quality of school leadership
- Increase the level of funding
- Schools can and should work collaboratively and share best practice
- Promote and support relationships both between primary and secondary schools and also employers
- A greater emphasis should be placed on schools as an integral part of the wider community

Theme 1: Standards, Attainment and Support for School Improvement

What do you think are the causes of underachievement for children and young people in secondary schools in South Gloucestershire?

The overall response was that there is a lack of aspiration in South Gloucestershire. This was noted at community, family and individual levels and perhaps linked to this was issues of social deprivation.

The demography of the area is thought to have an impact on attainment; schools nearest Bristol borders have intake from Bristol areas that have a high number of disadvantaged children. However South Gloucestershire schools do not receive the same levels of funding as Bristol schools for these students.

Another contributing factor to underachievement was the quality of the teaching; poor teacher motivation and teacher absence was seen as creating a lack of consistency in teaching.

The National Curriculum was criticised for being unimaginative, uninteresting and not being tailored to individual abilities.

The schools themselves are seen as too large, with large class sizes.

Poor leadership was seen as contributing to underachievement; responses highlighted 'Weak leadership teams, weak governance, lack of capacity in leadership' as causes of underachievement.

It was felt that time was being spent on 'futile bureaucracy' and trying to achieve targets rather than focussing on improving teaching.

An area that was felt to be weak was the transitional period between primary and secondary schools, it was felt that this was an area to be explored when considering underachievement as well as a need to need to develop transparent, open and honest dialogue between partner primary schools and secondary settings to understand what is holding pupils back in secondary education. A lack of coherence in initiatives perhaps means that good practise is not sufficiently 'joined up'.

Finally there was a strong feeling that there was not enough funding.

What do you think could be done to raise standards in the secondary schools in South Gloucestershire?

There was a wide range of responses to this question, with many respondents picking out the need for training and supporting teachers, with suggestions including reducing staff turnover and absences as well as 'helping teachers to retire'. Teacher coaching was also suggested as a way of supporting teachers who were struggling to maintain control in the classroom.

Some respondents thought that encouraging competition between schools would help to raise standards, but also that a sharing of expertise would prove beneficial.

Criticism was levelled at Headmasters for 'empire building' through the Academies, but there was a suggestion that better primary schools were needed with one respondent suggesting that a stronger relationship between primary and secondary schools would enable secondary schools to provide feedback to primaries about gaps in pupil learning.

Some responses focussed on the pupil experience suggesting that creating a more conducive environment to learning might help – suggestions included providing comfortable uniforms and better food, but also encouraging a greater level of involvement between the schools and parents.

Smaller classes were advocated as were lessons in 'life' skills such as information about wages, working and taxes.

Finally, inadequate funding was identified as an issue.

How should the council support and challenge secondary schools to improve and achieve excellence?

There was no common thread in the responses to this question and a range of suggestions were put forward:

Encourage schools to embed themselves more into the community

Monitor teachers (without prior notice)

Assistance for pupils who wish to travel to schools more suited to their interests

Encourage initiatives such as 'Ambitions'

Support collaborative working amongst schools

Support schools to reduce numbers of poor teachers

Commission extra support and commission additional inspections

Punish bullying as opposed to rewarding non-bullying

Make national comparisons of achievements

Promote advisors to follow up Ofsted Inspections

Co-ordinate INSET days

Reduce traded service fees to concentrate money on resources

Increase funding

Theme 2: School Organisation, Use of Resources, School – to – School Collaboration, Partnership Working

Does the current organisation of 11-16 and 16-18 education meet the needs of children and young people in South Gloucestershire and promote high standards?

The answers here are more easily quantified; 9 respondents said 'yes', 4 said 'no' and 4 said 'don't know'.

One respondent suggested raising aspirations at KS3 and KS4, whilst others pointed out the surplus capacity in all but 3 South Gloucestershire schools.

Lastly, it was noted that the current organisation of post 16 education works for some but that there are not enough students working at this level.

How should schools work together to challenge each other and share their best practice? Have you seen good examples of this happening already?

Overall most respondents were positive about schools working together and mentioned Patchway, Abbeywood and Bradley Stoke, Castle and Downend as examples of where sharing best practise was working well.

However, although Winterbourne International Academy and Yate International Academy are also working together, it was suggested that this was having an adverse effect on Winterbourne.

One respondent noted that it was a nice sentiment but didn't work in practise and another noted that Cabot Learning Federation seemed to be working well although some of their focus was external to South Gloucestershire.

Theme 3: Learning, Skills and Wider Economy

What could employers, schools and colleges do together to ensure children and young people get these skills?

Although there was a wide range of responses, the overall theme was to increase and strengthen links between schools, colleges and employers.

It was suggested that employers work with schools and colleges to provide specialist lectures and financial support to pupils.

There was also an emphasis on ensuring that pupils gained the correct skills for the workplace with the delivery of skills-based learning required all through the curriculum.

Other respondents noted that it was important the pupils were aware of what would be expected at work, for example spelling and grammar in written work may be overlooked in school but it would be essential at work. Ensuring that pupils understood areas of skills shortage in the job market was also mentioned. One respondent was concerned that unconditional offers made by colleges was perhaps undermining the importance of getting 5 A*-C GCSE's.

It was felt that more placements were needed as was more funding.

Theme 4: Community Engagement in Learning

How can all of South Gloucestershire's residents participate in and support children and young people's learning?

The feedback for this question advocated using the school buildings for activities such as adult education classes and voluntary/community led ventures so that the school would become more integrated into the community. Intergenerational visits from the community groups was also suggested to support the idea that secondary school was not so much a 'rite of passage' but part of lifelong learning.

It was noted that access to secondary schools for parents was not as easy as it is with primary schools and this was felt to be an issue.

Schools could be used to support core parenting skills, targeting support to parents and offering support for pupils with 'less aspirational' backgrounds so that children were able to participate fully in learning.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions relating to the work of the commission?

In this section there was an identified need for change:

'For too long our secondary schools have remained the same. It shouldn't be possible for staff to deploy the same teaching methods that we experienced in our own education.'

That change should be driven by the community, pupils and parents who should be involved in consultations;

'Ask pupils what they think is wrong - they will know'

Also that the size of schools had become a problem, with not enough emphasis on individuals

'We are not all designed to be one of a large organisation of a 1000 + let alone one where we have to change room every 50 minutes with no autonomy and no chance to take responsibility for our own work'.

South Gloucestershire Education Commission – Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference below were set by the South Gloucestershire Children and Young People Committee at its meeting on 1st May 2013.

1. Purpose of the Commission

To investigate and explore the model of secondary and post 16 educational provision in South Gloucestershire and the achievement of children and young people in South Gloucestershire schools, drawing together the findings into a report that can be used to inform future provision planning and school improvement approaches.

2. Mandate

The overall quality of provision in secondary schools is not high enough at either Key Stage 4 or 5 and standards are not as high as they should be. Although the principal focus is on schools, the Commission will appreciate partner and stakeholder engagement from a wide range of organisations and individuals (e.g. Further Education, Higher Education, Training Providers, Health, the Voluntary Sector, Faith Groups etc. The Commission has the support and freedom to look at a variety of issues in an imaginative way. Commissioners also have the freedom to investigate possible initiatives which could improve educational attainment in South Gloucestershire. Research, analysis, data retrieval and secretariat support is available to the Commission through dedicated officers. The Children and Young People Committee of the Council supports the Commission and will seek to secure or re-direct funding to financially support all recommendations of the Commission which are accepted by the Committee.

3. Rationale

The Council believes that education is one of the key drivers in increasing the social mobility and economic productivity of South Gloucestershire's future adult population. In its mission to radically improve the life chances of our children it is seeking external scrutiny and expertise to build on its work to date and inform its policies particularly over the next five years. The Education Commission will be an expert and independent panel, using robust evidence to offer insight into how education can best be provided in the area and how we can continue to improve achievement and outcomes for children and young people and make South Gloucestershire schools the first choice for local parents.

4. Expected Deliverables

The overarching deliverable is to enhance achievement and well-being of South Gloucestershire children and young people. This would lead to a positive impact on their families and communities.

5. Issues to Address

The Children and Young People committee have identified the following key questions which it would like the commission to address:

- Does the current organisation of 11-16 and 16-18 education meet the needs of children and young people in South Gloucestershire and promote high standards?
- How can South Gloucestershire ensure the appropriate balance of support and challenge to schools and colleges?
- How can South Gloucestershire ensure collaborations between schools are effective in sharing effective practice and raising attainment?
- How can South Gloucestershire employers define the capabilities beyond literacy and maths they need for the workplace?
- How can South Gloucestershire Council, employers and schools/colleges work together to develop a South Gloucestershire learning offer that will address the attainment, capabilities and skills issues?
- How can South Gloucestershire be developed as a Learning County with high expectations for all?
- How can South Gloucestershire support young people to realise future economic opportunities?

6. Process and Timeframe

Four evidence gathering events will be organised to review the range of themes explored by the commission. There will also be some visits to educational establishments. Prior to each evidence gathering event, South Gloucestershire Council will provide a briefing to the Commission with respect to the particular theme of the session. This briefing will also include issues for consideration by the Commission and will be useful for framing each individual session. The officers assigned to the Commission will also provide, in advance of each session, any further information or comparative data requested by the Commission to inform each discussion. Officers will assist in writing up the findings and recommendations of each session to form the basis of the report. The report and recommendations will be published in December 2013.

Sessions of the Education Commission

Session/ Date	Focus	Witnesses	Papers
1 Sept 12 th 2013	Local Authority Support for School Improvement	Melanie Warnes (HT, The Castle) Ian Frost (HT, King's Oak) Phil Bevan (HT, Hanham High) Richard Badley (HT, Mangotsfield) Dave Baker (Exec HT, Bradley Stoke and Abbeywood) Mark Dee (HT The Park and Parkwall) Nicky Jones (HT Culverhill Special School) Jan Isaac (HT Emersons Green Primary School) Stuart Hill (Chair of Governors Castle School) Martin Cross (Vice Chair of Governors – Hanham High School) Geoff Howell (Chair of Governors Patchway, Callicroft Primary, School Forum member) Susannah Hill (Principal Adviser Settings and Schools) Sue Morgan (Senior School Improvement Adviser) Richard Sloan (Secondary Consultant) Tracey France (Strategic Adviser for Skills)	1 Programme Session 1 2a KS4 Provisional Results 2013 2b KS4 Resident v Educated Analysis 3a KS5 Provisional A and AS level data 2013 3b KS5 5yr results by school 2013 4 KS4 Data Projections 5a Self-evaluation Secondary September 2013 5b CYP Committee Detailed Standards Report Mar 2013 5c CYP Committee Options Report May 2013 5d School Improvement Policy 2013 (Draft) 5e Secondary Headteacher Residential 2013 Conference Papers 5f School Improvement Performance Board (SIPB) TOR 5g SIPB Minutes 18 07 13 6 Evidence Collection Form 7 Secondary Standards Presentation from orientation session
2 Oct 10 th 2013	Quality of Provision, including Post 16 arrangements	Melanie Warnes (HT, The Castle School) Keith Geary (HT, Marlwood School) Kathryn Khan (CoG Marlwood School) David Turrell CBE (HT, Sir Bernard Lovell School) Colin Money (Co-ordinator: Kingswood Partnership) Sally Hillier (Head of Sixth, BGS) Andy Martin (SLT resp for Sixth Form) Maria Filer (CEIAG, Brimsham Green School) Gareth Millington (HT, Chipping Sodbury School) David Hinkins (Deputy HT, Chipping Sodbury School)	1 Programme Session 2 2 Traded and Support Services Position Paper 3 Post 16 Position Paper 3a Strategic Area Review Options Paper May 2002 3b 14-19 inspection CYP Cttee report March 2005 3c CYP Cttee Report Review of Post 16 July 2009 3ci CYP Cttee Report Review of Post 16 July

Session/ Date	Focus	Witnesses	Papers
		Gill Hilleard (Head of Sixth Form, Chipping Sodbury School) Sue Morgan (Senior School Improvement Adviser) Sir David Carter (Cabot Learning Federation) Tracey France (Strategic Adviser for Skills) Nigel Minns (Head of Education, Learning and skills) Clare Medland (Head of Strategy & Development) Tanya Smith (Planning & Policy Manager)	2009 App 1 3cii CYP Cttee Report Review of Post 16 July 2009 App 3 3d Northern Education Association Post16 Review Report 3e CYP Cttee Report post 16 review May 2010 3f Sixth Form Support & Challenge detail Nov 09 3g Post 16 action plan draft Jan2011 3h South Glos Statement of Priorities 2011 3i South Gloucestershire 14-19 review May2011 v4 4a Commissioning-of-places- strategy-exec summary 4b Commissioning-of-places- strategy-Full (110 pages) 5a Destinations Data 2011 5b NEET Analysis June 2013 6 Dot Maps of pupil home location by school
3 Nov 7 th 2013	Skills and Employer Engagement	Jane Millicent (HT Patchway Community College) Richard Badley (HT, Mangotsfield Secondary School) Lynn Merilion (Principal City of Bristol College) Dr Rob Gibson (HT, The Ridings Federation) Lesley Gavin (Job Centre Plus) Nicola Lace (Study Programmes Manager , KTS Training)	1 Programme Session 3 2 Aspirations Briefing Note Oct 13 3 Case Studies Employment & kills Hub 4 Skilled Workforce COMT 2ND July 2013
4 Nov 21 st 2013	Engagement Audit with school leaders, governors and local authority officers	Gareth Manson (Councillor) Ruth Davis (Councillor) Peter Murphy (Director of Children, Adults & Health) Denis De Souza (Quality Assurance Senior Adviser, Vulnerable group) Christine Jamrozy (SEN Team Manager)	1 Programme Session 2 2 Position Paper Post 16 LDD and SEND 3 SEN-LLDD Elements of WoE Development Plan April 2012

Session/ Date	Focus	Witnesses	Papers
		Geri Palfreeman (Service Manager - Preventative Services) Dee Mooney (Youth Intervention Support Practice Manager) Geoff Hardman (NAS/UWT Representative) Peter Hitchman (ATL Representative) Wendy Weston GMB (Bristol Public Services Branch Secretary) Sara Jane Watkins (Vice Principal SGS College)	
Visits: Commissioners made paired visits to secondary schools and colleges to discuss key issues relating to the work of the Commission			
Officer Support for the Commission: The Commission was supported in its work by Tom Morrison, Quality Assurance Adviser (Performance and Research), South Gloucestershire Council			