

National Challenge in Bradford

A joint report from Bradford Council and Education Bradford

Introduction

The National Challenge was launched by Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in June 2008. He set out an ambitious programme of support to secure higher standards in all secondary schools so that, by 2011, at least 30 per cent of pupils in every school will gain five or more GCSEs at A*-C, including both English and maths.

He asked schools and their local authority to identify the correct support package for each school's needs, and committed £400m of funding nationally for National Challenge until 2011.

The Bradford context

There are currently nine maintained secondary schools and one academy with results below the 30% benchmark. Education Bradford, the Council and school leaders made the decision to involve the nine schools below the benchmark and additional schools above 30% which valued the opportunity for additional resource to consolidate their improvement in performance. The one academy below the benchmark receives support directly from the Government.

Education Bradford gained the commitment of all its secondary schools to the National Challenge strategy. It was agreed that by having a large 'critical mass' of schools involved this would support successful partnership working and help us to achieve the step change in performance for Bradford's young people. The additional resources provided by the National Challenge include the allocation of nationally accredited National Challenge Advisers who are working closely with schools to target activity, existing and additional resources to ensure accelerated improvement in student achievement.

The Bradford plan

Six highly qualified and experienced school improvement professionals have been recruited by Education Bradford as National Challenge Advisers. All have had successful experience as headteachers and have been selected because of the relevance of their experience and understanding of the context in which Bradford schools work.

Their role as National Challenge Advisers is to:

- understand their assigned school's performance, its self evaluation, the causes of low attainment and its capacity for improvement
- challenge and strengthen the school improvement plan, assessing the strategy for improving teaching and learning and tackling barriers to learning
- help the school to identify what support it needs from the local authority, providers of school improvement services and wider Children's Services
- support the school to achieve coherence in implementing major reforms if required
- regularly evaluate and monitor the impact of improvement plans, through visits to the school and scrutiny of pupil tracking data
- learn from and share experiences and best practice between schools.

265 days of National Challenge Adviser time have been allocated to Bradford. The National Challenge advisers have been working with the schools since 1 November 2008.

Each school has been working closely with its National Challenge Adviser (NCA) to write and implement effective Raising Attainment Plans (RAPs) that will ensure that barriers to improvement are overcome and the additional resources will bring about accelerated improvements.

Bradford schools have responded quickly and important work is already in place.

- All schools have an approved RAP and a nationally accredited NCA working with them
- All schools have appointed a RAP management group of senior staff, the NCA and the subject leaders for English and maths
- There is a clear and urgent focus on the achievement of current Y11 students and also on planning ahead for Y9 and Y10
- Additional capacity is being built in English and maths departments through the deployment of teachers and support staff to key groups of students in these subjects
- A range of activities are being put in place to raise attainment; for example, the early entry of students in GCSEs to provide them with more than one opportunity to achieve the required standard; extensive additional study and revision sessions; one to one tuition
- Schools are ensuring that improvements are sustainable by appointing additional teachers, teaching assistants, attendance officers, and advanced skills teachers (ASTs). School management systems are being strengthened and there is an additional investment in staff training so that teaching ensures all students make good progress
- New courses are being introduced that meet the needs and aspirations of students, and schools are improving the way that students' progress is assessed and monitored so that underachievement can be tackled quickly and effectively, keeping young people on track for success.

In 2008/9 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has allocated £2, 048 587 of additional funding to support National Challenge initiatives in Bradford schools. The DCSF has agreed the funding allocations for each school based on the level of support required.

Analysis of student performance data demonstrates that the additional resources will ensure that all Bradford schools are above the floor target of 30% five A*-C grades by 2011.

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