

## **Knowsley: Transforming Secondary Education**

Knowsley is at the heart of the North West region and is one of the five metropolitan districts that make up Merseyside, the others being Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral. The Borough's current population is 150,475. It is an area that suffers from multiple economic and social disadvantages, low levels of attainment and below average progression post -16.

The Borough's population has the following characteristics:

- 6<sup>th</sup> most deprived Borough nationally (DTLR Index of Deprivation, 2000)
- 18 of the Borough's 22 wards fall within the most deprived 10% in England
- 1 in 3 households in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (33%)
- 44% of children being eligible for Free School Meals
- almost 1 in 4 of the population being under the age of 16yrs compared with only 1 in 9 nationally

Knowsley has recognised that raising levels of attainment is a key priority, especially at secondary level and in recent years the authority has successfully tested innovative new approaches to address this for certain groups of young people.

### **What has been achieved?**

Knowsley is implementing the **Transformational Agenda** to raise standards in schools. This is based on a series of five programmes designed to significantly raise standards in schools, over 3 years. The first programme, the 'Year 5 – 8 Project', recognises that transforming secondary education cannot be restricted solely to activities within the secondary sector. This case study focuses specifically on the other four strands of Knowsley's transformational agenda.

**Transforming Teaching and Learning:** This strand seeks to ensure that Knowsley has the very best teaching in the authority's schools. The strategy is implemented via three strands:

- A training programme delivered through a partnership between the LEA and the internationally renowned Alite Company led by Alistair Smith (Knowsley believe this is the first partnership of its type in the country). This is targeted at senior and middle managers together with the establishment of a cohort of 'Lead Learners' who will act as catalysts and conduct action research.
- Two Teaching and Learning Consultants (TLCs) who work collaboratively to ensure expertise is equally available and becomes 'embedded'. They also have a role to ensure that the work of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is integrated with other strands of the Transformational Strategy and the national Key Stage 3 Strategy, particularly the Teaching and Learning in the Foundation strand (TLF). Six secondary schools, and Knowsley's Special schools with secondary aged pupils, are engaged in a variety of action research projects, supported by TLCs.
- Network Learning Communities action-research programme has commenced, supported by the National College for School Leadership and the Centre for Education Leadership (University of Manchester). This project involves all of Knowsley's secondary schools and is a key part of our strategy for developing and sharing good practice.

**14-19 Collegiate:** This strand is the development of a new, more vocational curriculum for 14-19 year olds including maximised use of e-learning and provision of courses in construction skills All students aged 14-19 will have access to the curriculum and support opportunities provided by the Collegiate. The Knowsley 14-19 Collegiate consists of a number of formal partners, each of whom have committed to the Collegiate principle and are represented within its formal decision structure. The Chair of the Governance forum is Professor Simon Lee - Rector and Chief Executive of Liverpool Hope University.

Each student will have a Home school but will be able to access a variety of courses at a number of venues either directly or virtually via ICT or Video Conferencing. Venues include Knowsley Community College, the new Vocational Skills Centre (VSC), a Specialist school, or a City Learning Centre. A student entitlement will ensure appropriate support and guidance and the Collegiate will be governed through a Partnership and project managed through the following 5 strands:

- Curriculum
- Vocational Skills Centre
- E-learning
- Student entitlement
- Employer liaison

**Plus One Challenge.** The Plus One Challenge was devised to help pupils gain results at least one grade higher than those predicted following mock examinations. The innovative programme, which last year helped Knowsley students improve GCSE performance by more than four times the national average, has been extended to maximise use of the very latest ICT.

Provision includes:

- A new purpose-designed interactive website to aid revision and exam technique
- Revision tips and subject quizzes provided by text message to students' mobile phones
- Specially recorded Chill Out Compact Discs featuring "mood music" to aid relaxation and revision
- On-line access to virtual examinations in a range of subjects
- Access to e-Mentors to assist students revising core subjects
- Revision incentives including music and book tokens.

**Excellence in Cities** One aspect of this is **Excellence Challenge**, which has been introduced to improve the attainment of pre and post-16 year olds, and to increase participation rates amongst post-16 year olds.

Developments during the 1<sup>st</sup> year included: introducing Higher Education support staff into the 2 schools with 6<sup>th</sup> forms and Knowsley Community College who offered group and one to one support for all 'A' level students; providing Master classes in subjects such as Maths, English and History as enrichment opportunities; and trips to Higher Education Institutions.

In its second year Higher Education support staff have been employed to work with pre-16's to highlight Higher Education as a viable option for personal and professional development. Higher Education staff will work collaboratively with staff within the schools especially Learning Mentors, Careers Co-ordinators and Connexions advisers.

### **Key Achievements**

- Key Stage 3 – the 13<sup>th</sup> most improved authority in overall terms since 1998 and in 2001 our combined performance increase was 17% compared with 9% nationally
- Key Stage 4 – the percentage of 5+A\*-C GCSE grades has improved by three times the national rate.
- Seven out of eleven schools exceeded 30% 5+A\*-C GCSE grades
- No school achieved below 20% 5+A\*-C GCSE grades, two years ahead of the Government's target
- In 2001 54% of pupils who received learning mentor support under Excellence in Cities exceeded their predicted GCSE grades

## **Service Delivery Tips**

### Vision and Strategy:

- Seek elected member support early in the process and ensure cross-council support
- Focus on three levels (pupil, school and system) and rates of change (short, medium and long) simultaneously but prioritise quick wins
- Ensure there is a coherence to the presentation of the strategy i.e. each strand delivers on a particular objective.

### Consultation

- Adopt a campaign approach – sell the message but critically the benefits, use novel, newsworthy ideas, which raise the profile and impact.
- Use market information and feedback to evaluate all activities and inform subsequent implementation.

### Partnership

- Gain 'buy-in' by all of the schools early in the process so that a partnership approach is adopted and ensure ownership is reflected back in press and media messages to avoid alienation.

### Actions

- Focus actions so that immediate wins target pupils in key year groups i.e. Yr. 9 & 11 (e.g. Plus One Challenge), medium term actions impact on professional practice (e.g. Learning & Teaching, KS3 Strategy), whilst long term changes focus on system level changes (e.g. 14 – 19 Collegiate).

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