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*October 2016*

# Achieving Educational Excellence in Knowsley: *A Review of Attainment*

*A Report by ResPublica for  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council*



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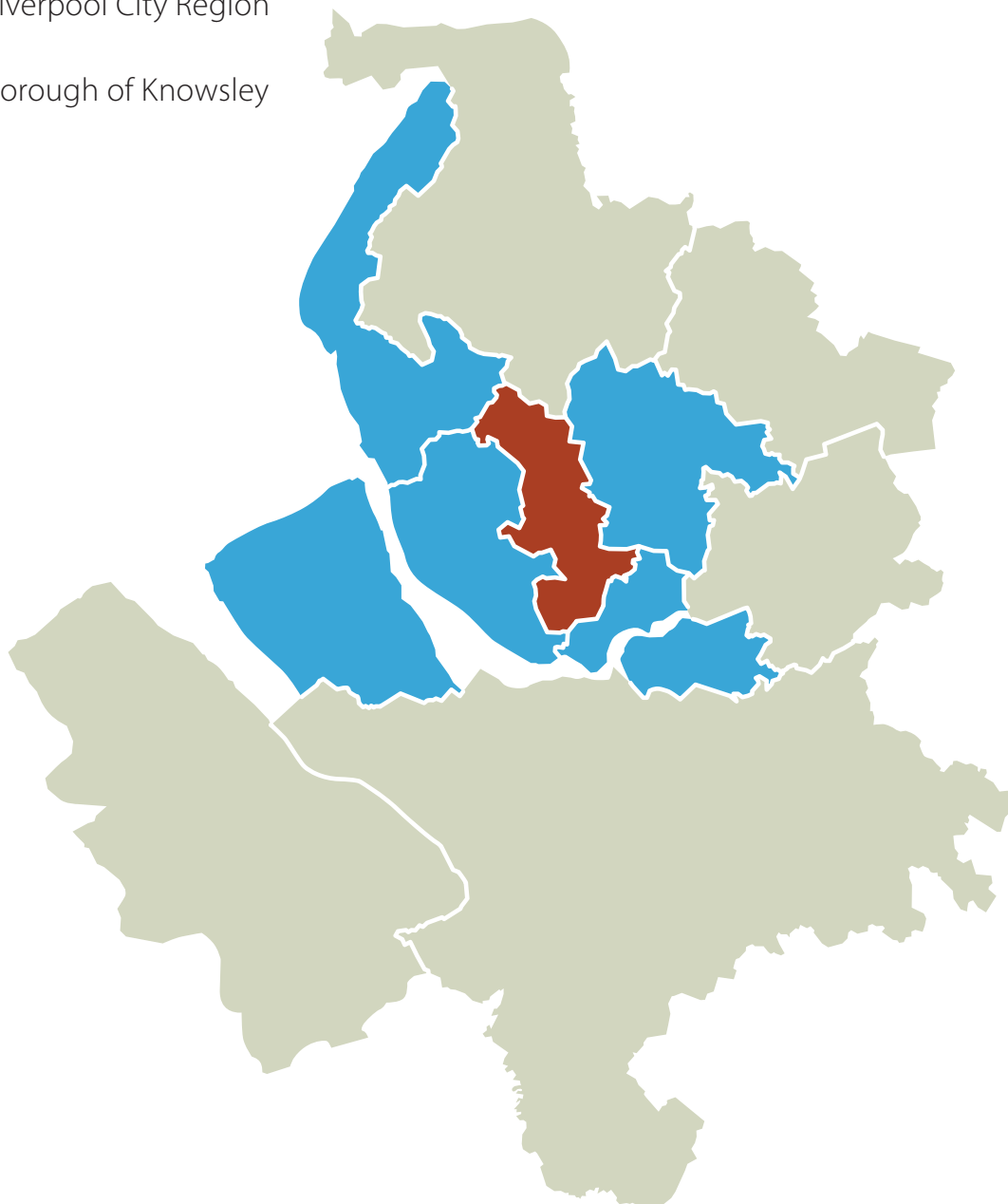
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## Knowsley and the Liverpool City Region

 Liverpool City Region

 Borough of Knowsley





# Preface

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This report was completed in June 2016. Since then much has changed. We effectively have a new government with a new Prime Minister and a new Secretary of State for Education.

In her first speech as Prime Minister Theresa May announced her mission to lead a one nation Government, to tackle social injustice and make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for everyone. In addressing the concerns of working families directly the Prime Minister pledged to fight the 'burning injustice' which means that:

*"If you're a white, working class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately."*

In terms of education policy we have already seen with the publication of the Government's Green Paper, 'Schools that work for everyone', the intention to allow new grammar schools to open along with other major school reforms.

The proposals to expand or create new selective schools, or to allow existing non-selective schools to become selective, are based on the explicit condition that they: Take a proportion of pupils from lower-income households; Establish a feeder primary in a low-income area; Provide support to ensure "good quality non-selective places locally"; Partner with existing non-selective school or ensure

opportunities to join the selective school at different ages, such as 14 and 16 – as well as 11.

With a small government majority in the commons, and a high level of opposition to grammar schools across all parties, this policy could be defeated. However, if legislation is passed to allow this expansion it is possible that schools in Knowsley could, at some future date, consider the option to become selective. Academies will be at liberty to pursue this agenda regardless of either the Local Authority or Education Commission's position on the matter.

We have updated aspects of this report to reflect this new reality and make recommendations to Government to further strengthen the conditions for selective schools in places like Knowsley.

Additionally, provisional GCSE results for 2016 have been made available since the analysis of Knowsley's educational performance contained in this report. We have not updated the analysis to include most recent data, which will not be published until January 2017. However, it does not look like these results will alter the underlying trends. Unfortunately, the performance of Knowsley's schools appear not to have improved on previous years or significantly effect the borough's standing in league tables.



# Executive Summary

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*"This review details the actions that will need to be taken in Knowsley over the coming years. It will also serve to make wider policy recommendations to Government about what is needed in places with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils from White British backgrounds."*

## Introduction

Guided by current Government thinking Knowsley has made a pledge to improve the quality of education in the borough, to deliver educational excellence so that every child and young person can achieve to the best of their ability. Knowsley Council has recently established an Education Commission to reverse the cycle of underperformance by improving outcomes for children in secondary education and address inequalities within the borough as well as enable the wider contribution of the school system to improving life outcomes for Knowsley residents.

This review details the actions that will need to be taken over the coming years to realise the Commission's vision for education in the borough. It will also serve to make wider policy recommendations to Government about what is needed in places like Knowsley, with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils from White British backgrounds.

## Knowsley's Story

Knowsley is currently the second most deprived authority in England (IMD, 2015) with high levels of economic inactivity and low skill levels – over 15 per cent of the working population having no qualifications, compared with the national average of 8 per cent. Schools in the borough contain a high proportion of

disadvantaged pupils (in receipt of FSM) from white working class backgrounds.

According to the 2011 census Knowsley is one of the least culturally diverse authorities in England and Wales, over 95 per cent of the resident population are White British.

Despite improvements in recent years, Knowsley is currently the lowest performing authority in the country for pupils achieving the government's benchmark of five A\* to C grade GCSEs, including English and Maths. However, there are significant variations in achievement between different phases of education in Knowsley, with early years and primary schools faring better than secondary schools. Prior to 2013 Early Years outcomes were in line with the national average, though the percentage of children achieving a good level of development has since plateaued. Primary school outcomes in Knowsley are broadly in line with the national average, although with relatively fewer pupils achieving very high KS2 results. By secondary school educational outcomes are significantly below national expectations. A large number of pupils transfer out of the borough for their secondary education, with those leaving amongst the most academically able and performing considerably better than those who stay in the borough. Knowsley also has a high proportion of 'Missing Talent' defined as pupils who score in the top 10 per cent nationally at age 11 but fail to achieve in the top 25 per cent at GCSE.

There have been many local and national initiatives aimed at tackling the longstanding problem within Knowsley's secondary education system. The past 10-15 years have seen a programme of constant change and reorganisation in the borough. During this period the number of secondary schools has reduced from eleven to six, achieved via a process of mergers, closures and significant capital investment in new Centres for Learning as part of the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme. This concept of transformation that emerged in the borough and which was intended to bring world-class education to Knowsley inadvertently pushed already struggling schools into sharper decline. Learning spaces designed to accommodate a curricula focus on alternative provision – BTECS and more vocational training routes – served to exacerbate problems of attainment in English and Maths and the neglect of strategies to improve academic attainment. The open plan layout of learning spaces, without corridors and few traditional classrooms were ill-suited to the demands of teaching traditional academic subjects at secondary level and hindered effective teaching and learning. The Borough has since spent significant funds rectifying these design mistakes. At the same time Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) conditions meant that the opportunity to significantly improve the calibre of teaching was not available to the borough, while recruitment problems, particularly in relation to more senior teaching positions maintained.

Since 2013 four of the remaining six secondary schools have converted to Academy status and all schools in the borough now have a stronger focus on academic attainment having introduced curriculum and pedagogical changes. The feeling amongst the borough's new emerging academies is that they have now charted a new course and that they must now be supported to hold their nerve in this new endeavour.

## *What Works in Education*

The factors that can influence educational attainment are potentially very broad. This can range from what directly happens to pupils in schools; the role of parents and how family background can determine aspirations, attitudes and behaviours; and wider societal effects that can contribute to opportunity or disadvantage in the educational experience.

### *Improving educational attainment in schools*

The links between poor educational attainment and economic disadvantage are well established and are a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility in the UK. The research evidence shows that educational deficits emerge early in children's lives, even before entry into school.

However, as the turnaround in London's school system has shown it is possible to close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils in urban areas. The evidence from London indicates that it is contact with schools that makes the difference in reversing a performance gap between early years and Key Stage 2, and in narrowing the gap between affluent and disadvantaged pupils. Of particular note, attainment for White Working Class students has improved in the city - this points to improvements in the quality of London's Schools above other external factors.

There is growing consensus among many experts that setting a high attainment goal for primary pupils at Key Stage 2 (Level 5c or equivalent) is likely to ensure success at Key Stage 4. Analysis indicates that the chances of achieving a Grade C or higher at GCSE increases significantly if a pupil achieves a Level 4b across Reading, Writing and Maths at primary, compared to a lower Level 4c.<sup>1</sup>

The finding that emerges from the literature is that there is no one game changing intervention. Rather, schools that are successful in closing the attainment gap are using a large number of strategies (18 per school, on average) in order to raise

the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. More successful schools appeared to be implementing their strategies in greater depth and with more attention to detail.

There is a range of overseas evidence, mainly from the United States that identifies effective interventions in closing the education gap and which has had an influence on policy making in the UK, namely Charter Schools that have informed the Free School/Academy Programme. The evidence for Charter Schools is inconclusive, however, those belonging to the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP Schools) have proven to be a general exception, demonstrating large positive effects. As of 2015, 45 percent of KIPP students have earned a four-year college degree after finishing eighth grade at a KIPP middle school ten or more years ago. This is above the national average for all students (34 percent), and five times the rate for students from low-income families nationwide (9 percent).

### *The role of parenting*

Parents have a profound impact on their children's learning and development. In infancy the parent acts as the child's first teacher and the child learns within the context of a warm, responsive primary relationship in a stimulating environment. Support for parents and high quality early years provision is necessary to offset some of the known impacts on cognitive development for very young disadvantaged children.

Once children enter formal schooling parental engagement and parental involvement remain a key element in children's attainment. However, white working class parents are less likely than most other ethnic groups to engage. Schools, local authorities and local community services can work together to generate greater parental engagement. Parenting programmes and family learning provide a way to bridge home learning and formal school learning, and the evidence shows they have positive impact for both parents and children. Parental engagement strategies should be built around planning, leadership, collaboration and sustained improvement.

However, parental engagement is not always necessary for achieving improvements to attainment. For example, Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney, London and the KIPP schools in the US have achieved significant improvements without initial parental support.

### *Community anchors*

Community anchors are independent, community-run and led organisations, rooted in a 'sense of place' and with a mission to improve things for the whole community. Schools have the ability to perform the role of community anchors, due to their facilities, buildings and grounds; strong organisational structures; and large numbers of staff from across the local population. US community schools are a good example of the extended role that schools can play within the community. These schools are often rooted in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and focused on improving educational attainment; lowering drop-out rates; and reducing risky behaviour. In England, the Extended Schools Initiative was intended to make schools a focal point for their local communities. There is little causal evidence specifically linking community schools to attainment, although they do positively affect absenteeism and truancy.

### *The Conditions for Success*

In achieving educational transformation, there are a number of operational and contextual factors that affect the approach.

### *Overcoming the problem*

Knowsley has experienced persistent underperformance in its secondary schools over an extended period. This problem is increasingly intergenerational, with poor educational attainment passing from parents to their children. It is contributing to the cycle of deprivation in the borough and preventing Knowsley from realising its ambitions to create a prosperous and inclusive economy.

With a predominantly white working class population and high levels of deprivation the problem in Knowsley is two-fold and negatively reinforcing. This is not to say that improvements cannot be made. London has had much success in raising the attainment of its disadvantaged White British pupils. However, there is a sense that for too long there have been low expectations of the potential of young people in Knowsley's schools. The emphasis on vocational education and the lack of Sixth Form provision in a secondary school environment within the borough suggests that a non-academic path is already predetermined for the majority of the student population.

At the same time, a lack of diversity within the resident population provides limited access to wider experience and influences that might positively impact on the aspirations of younger people. The risk is of unintentionally narrow horizons, limited models of what is possible and a lack of know-how to effect transformative change.

### *Meeting the operational challenge*

**Governance:** The Local Education Authority (LEA) has responsibility for the overall quality of education provision in the borough, but does not hold the levers of power to directly implement reform in Academies that are independent of local authority control. Following the recent White Paper the Government has announced that it will not bring in legislation forcing schools to convert to academies, but will instead introduce new powers which will trigger conversion of all schools in an area if a council is underperforming or if it is no longer financially viable for it to run schools. There is still a risk that underperforming schools in Knowsley may be compelled to adopt academy status, but primary schools are performing well and already working in collaborative peer networks. This could provide the route for primary schools to form future multi-academy trusts, according to their own timeframe. This could be a catalyst for a renewed focus on pursuing an ambitious attainment programme, the key goal being a greater share of children attaining higher at KS2, (Level 5+) or 'exceeding' the new Age Related Expectations.

**Change & implementation:** Knowsley has taken a range of actions to address the challenges in its education provision. The past decade can be described as a period of rapid and substantial change. Indeed, there is an element of change fatigue in the borough and a need, now that most secondary schools have converted to academies, to bed down and see through those systemic changes. There is, however, a sense that the improvement efforts in the borough have not been focussed, monitored or applied consistently over time. The systematic implementation of improvement interventions could reap rewards for the borough's attainment.

**Early education provision:** In recognition of the crucial developmental role for parents (and other close, frequent carers such as grandparents), consultation with senior Knowsley MBC officers in Early Help outlined how the network of children's centres is now focussing on the 0-2 years cohort and includes tracking of children attending provision. There is, consequently, a strong foundation of early years provision on which to build in the borough.

**Data driven:** Education is closely measured and monitored and performance reported to central government and local leaders. Local leaders and school senior management teams should ensure the data collection at Borough and individual school level monitors performance against key metrics is used to pinpoint support for individual pupils and is used to inform an iterative programme of improvement interventions.

### *Charting a way forward*

**In-school transformation:** In achieving improvements in attainment, the evidence is clear that a 'school first' approach should be taken. While parental involvement and engagement are important underpinning factors in achievement, and while schools have a focal role as community development anchors, for disadvantaged areas more immediate gains can be made through in-school reforms. This means that it is changes in the classroom – to teacher quality, teaching methods, an ambitious, academic curriculum and discipline – that will have the largest and most immediate impacts.



**High primary school attainment:**

Achieving level 4 at KS2 is an ambitious goal for some schools and some students. In response, some schools are increasing their nursery provision to get 'upstream' of school readiness and the child's foundation level learning in order to have positive impact on the ultimate KS2 results. However, the evidence is clear that exceeding the national minimum, and achieving at level 4b or ideally 5+, is far more likely to lead to good attainment at GCSE.

**Team GB approach:** One of the key findings in what makes the difference to disadvantaged students is that all the potential interventions need to be applied consistently, to a high standard, monitored for impact and, crucially, implemented concurrently. There are useful comparisons to be drawn from the 'marginal gains' approach to improved performance implemented by the Great Britain Olympic cycling team. In an education setting, the 'Team GB' concept would mean interventions targeted at the student, the teacher, the curriculum, the school leadership and management. All these interventions will have benefits for attainment; all must be applied at the same time and closely monitored for impact and refinement.

**Economic development:** A good school attracts a premium in property prices within their catchment. For Knowsley Borough, a high performing school offers the potential to reinvent its image within the Liverpool City Region as a desirable area for families and could attract a different profile of resident and change the economic dynamic.

A high performing school also has the potential for ripple effects on all the schools in the borough. A desirable, high performing school drawing in families of higher socio-economic profile could help overcome some of the impacts of concentrated disadvantage. There is also an element of establishing a 'new normal' and establishing high expectations. Taken together this process establishes an environment where good performance and attainment is the assumed norm.

## Recommendations

### Government

The recommendations to Government focus on developing a new, productive relationship with local education leaders in Knowsley:

- The Secretary of State for Education should meet with the Council and school leaders to learn more about the borough's transformation programme and consider Knowsley becoming an 'achieving excellence area'.
- The Secretary of State should use her new involvement in the Local Growth Fund process to advocate for additional resources and support for a 'Knowsley Challenge' pilot.
- Government should ensure that any future grammar schools target the most disadvantaged areas, where there are no existing local schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

### Local Education Authority

The recommendations to the Local Education Authority focus on its role in operational improvement.

- The Borough should convene a Schools Senior Management Learning Network for secondary school Heads and senior management teams.
- The LEA should consider seeking sponsors to establish a sixth form Academy of Excellence. In the mould of the London Academy of Excellence.
- The LEA should investigate how Knowsley Council and the Archdiocese could establish their own primary school academies chain to ensure continuing high quality education provision feeds into the established secondary academies.

### Education Commission

The recommendations for the Education Commission focus on its potential role in strategic leadership for improvement.

- The Commission should appoint a 'Schools Transformation Tsar' to act as a mentor and troubleshooter for KMBC schools senior management teams.
- The Commission should seek to establish a North West Improvement Board with counterparts in the Liverpool City Region to design an improvement cycle and take responsibility for monitoring it.
- The Commission should develop a dedicated campaign to promote schools' efforts on transformation, their improvements and journey to date.

### Schools

The recommendations for schools emphasise the need for in-school action on attainment.

- All schools should adopt a 'Team GB' approach that identifies the inputs, tracks implementation and monitors progress.
- Primary schools should aim to achieve the aspirational target of level 5 (or new equivalent - Age Related Expectations) at KS2, as an evidence-backed route to laying the foundations for good GCSE performance at secondary school.

### Liverpool City Region

The recommendations for the City Region emphasise the role of education as a foundation for economic development.

- The LCR should scope a 'Northern Premium' to attract quality teachers to the region through incentives.

- The LCR should bid into the new round of local growth funding with a focus on the role of education in addressing the local skills deficit.
- The LCR should review the devolution deal asks to assess the role of education in contributing to economic performance.

1 Perera, N., et.al., 'Education in England: Progress and Goals', *Centre Forum*, Mar 2016.

2 Halton, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, South Tyneside, Salford, Gateshead, St.Helens, Redcar and Cleveland, Sunderland, Hartlepool.



# 1. Introduction

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*"Knowsley has made a pledge to improve the quality of education in the borough, to deliver educational excellence so that every child and young person can achieve to the best of their ability."*

Guided by current Government thinking Knowsley has made a pledge to improve the quality of education in the borough, to deliver educational excellence so that every child and young person can achieve to the best of their ability. The challenge is not without ambition. Over recent years there has been significant variation in achievement between the different phases of education in the borough. Performance in early years and primary education is in line with national expectations. However, by the end of secondary school the outcomes for children in Knowsley, although continuing to improve, are significantly below the performance of their statistical neighbours and national averages. Last year, secondary schools in the borough recorded the lowest GCSE pass rate in England.

Knowsley Council has recently established an Education Commission for the borough and this review will inform the Commission's undertaking to reverse the cycle of underperformance by improving outcomes for children in secondary education. More broadly the Commission aims to address inequalities within the borough and the wider contribution of the school system to improving life outcomes for Knowsley residents. This includes greater access to the opportunities arising from future economic growth, in the Liverpool City Region, and the Government's wider ambition to revive England's northern cities and create a 'Northern Powerhouse'.

This study will contribute to the vision for education in Knowsley and detail the actions that will need to be taken over the coming years to realise this ambition. It will also serve to make wider policy recommendations to Government about what is needed in places like Knowsley, with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils from White British backgrounds. Specifically this report provides:

- Analysis of the education system in Knowsley
- Evidence for 'what works' in improving educational attainment, particularly amongst disadvantaged pupils
- Exploration of the role of parenting and how schools can work with families and other service providers to improve educational outcomes
- Options for practical reform and the models to deliver high quality education and high educational outcomes, and
- A pathway towards achieving the vision for education in the Borough.



## 2. Knowsley's Story

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*"The legacy of post-industrial decline has seen falling levels of economic activity and a persistent mis-match between the low skills profile of the working age population and the requirements of an increasingly higher skilled labour market."*

### 2.1 About Knowsley

Formed in 1974 the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley is one of the six constituent local government districts of the Liverpool City Region. The borough comprises the townships and districts of Kirkby, Prescot, Huyton, Whiston, Halewood, Cronton and Stockbridge Village, all of which experienced rapid population expansion in the 1950's and '60's, resulting from the combination of industrialisation linked to large housing developments. However, the following decades saw the process of general economic decline – particularly in manufacturing – contributing to a significant fall in population, from some 194,600 in 1971 to 146,000 in 2011.

The legacy of post-industrial decline has seen falling levels of economic activity and a persistent mis-match between the low skills profile of the working age population and the requirements of an increasingly higher skilled labour market. Over 15 per cent of the working population have no qualifications, compared with the national average of 8 per cent, while schools in the borough are, despite improvements in recent years, the lowest performing in the country for pupils achieving the Government's benchmark of five A\* to C grade GCSEs, including English and maths.

Knowsley is currently the second most deprived authority in England (IMD, 2015) with large parts of the borough ranking highest amongst all local authorities for

both income and employment deprivation and 34 per cent of all children in the borough living in income deprived households. According to the latest 2011 census over 95 per cent of Knowsley's population are White British (representing one of the least culturally diverse authorities in England and Wales) with 80.9 per cent of residents describing themselves as Christian (the highest proportion in any local authority in England and Wales).

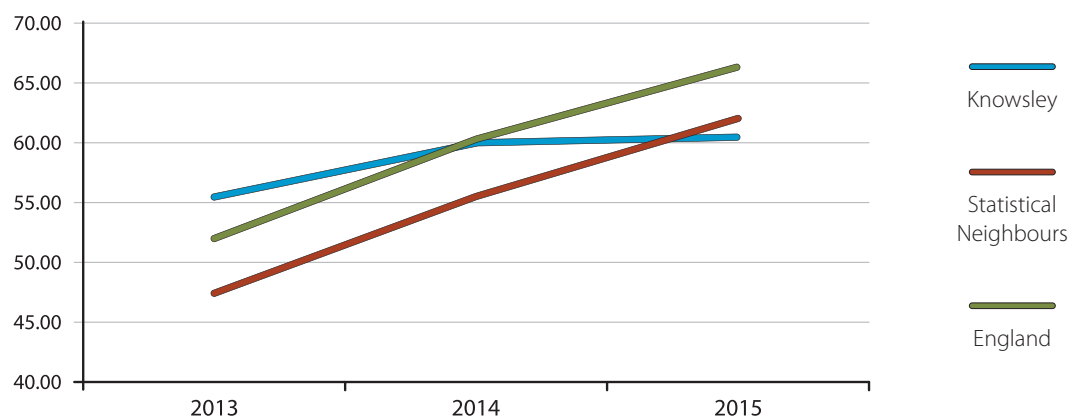
### 2.2 Education performance in Knowsley

There are significant variations in achievement between the different phases of education, with early years and primary schools faring much better than secondary schools in the borough.

#### 2.2.1 Early years

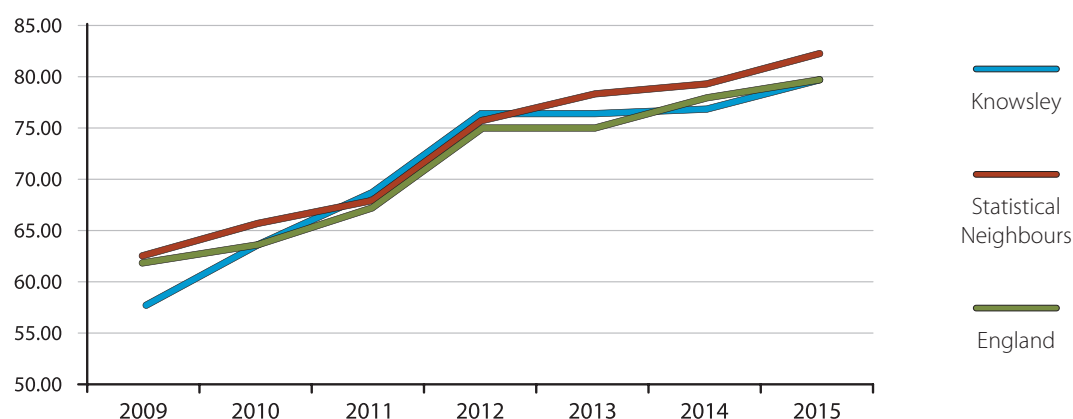
Prior to the introduction of the new framework for the Foundation Stage Profile (2013) early years performance indicators had shown outcomes for children in Knowsley as very much in line with national expectations and above the performance levels of its statistical neighbours.<sup>2</sup> However, since 2014 performance has reached a plateau with the percentage of children achieving a good level of development (in 2015) now lagging behind national averages and the levels achieved by statistical neighbours. (See Table 1, opposite)

Table 1: Percentage of children achieving good level of development in FSP



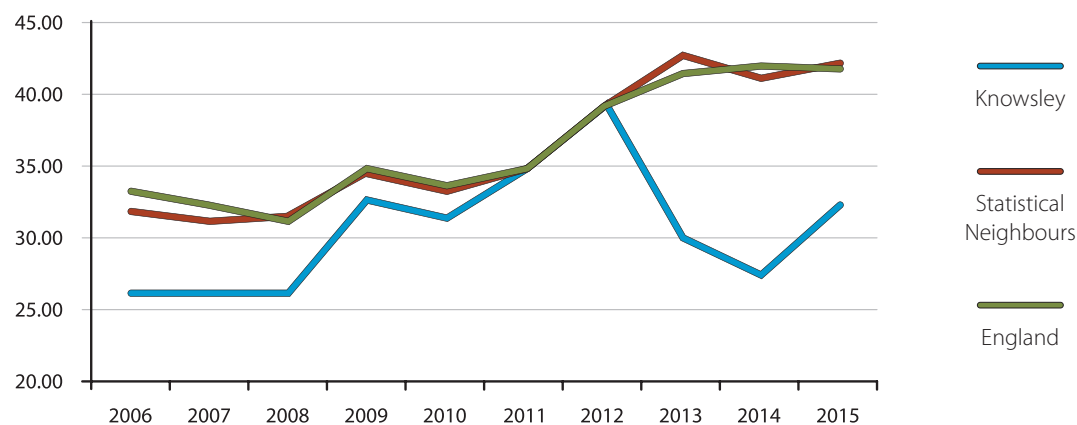
Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

Table 2: Percentage of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 4+ RWM



Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

Table 3: Percentage of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 5+ Maths



Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

### 2.2.2 Primary education

In the primary phase outcomes for Knowsley children are broadly in line with national expectations. Between 2009 and 2015, there was a significant improvement in primary Key Stage 2 results for children achieving level 4 and above in reading, writing and maths; from 58 per cent to 80 per cent, compared to a change from 62 per cent to 80 per cent nationally. Knowsley has continued to improve, however, since 2013 there has been a small drop in performance relative to its statistical neighbours. *(See Table 2, previous page)*

Attainment by the most disadvantaged pupils, measured in terms of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) is higher in Knowsley with 71 per cent achieving KS2 level 4 in Reading Writing and Maths (2015) compared to 66 per cent of FSM children nationally. Primary schools in Knowsley feature in the top quartile for performance by FSM pupils and are placed 30 in the National ranking.

However, the achievements of Knowsley pupils at the higher level 5 and above are lagging behind national averages in English and maths. Performance has improved over the past ten years, achieving in line with national averages for maths and English between 2011 and 2012, but the gap has since widened.

In 2015 37 per cent of Knowsley pupils achieved Key Stage 2 level 5+ for maths compared with 42 per cent nationally. *(See Table 3, previous page)*

In 2015 fewer pupils are achieving Key Stage 2 level 5+ for English with the gap between Knowsley (35 per cent) and England (43 per cent) widening to over 7 percentage points. *(See Table 4, opposite)*

Achievement at level 5+ varies between those pupils remaining in the borough for secondary education and those leaving for nearby secondary schools in neighbouring boroughs. Approximately 30 per cent of all Year 7 pupils leave the borough. On average 15 per cent more of those that do leave attain at level 5+ than those who remain in borough for secondary.

Of those pupils that transitioned to out of borough secondary schools in 2010 (corresponding to the 2015 GCSE cohort) 37 per cent achieved level 5+ in English compared with 22 per cent achievement rates for those remaining in the borough. *(See Table 5, opposite)*

Of those pupils that transitioned to out of borough secondary schools in 2010 (corresponding to the 2015 GCSE cohort) 42 per cent achieved level 5+ in English compared with 27 per cent achievement rates for those remaining in the borough. *(See Table 6, opposite)*

### 2.2.3 Secondary education

By the end of secondary school the outcomes for children in Knowsley are significantly below national expectations and although they have improved over recent years, this has not been sufficient to close the performance gap.

In 2015 just 37.4 per cent of pupils in Knowsley's schools achieved 5+ GCSEs grades A\* to C including English and Maths, compared to 53.8 per cent nationally. The most disadvantaged pupils, eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), fair even worse with just 20 per cent of this group attaining the Government benchmark compared with 33 per cent nationally. This is a gap that has widened over the past 10 years.

If we consider performance amongst all Knowsley residents, including those pupils attending schools in and out of the borough, we can see that the attainment rate rises to 46 per cent. This suggests that those pupils transitioning at Year 7 to out of borough schools are achieving higher than those within the borough. This is a finding which is supported by the previously observed fact that those achieving at KS level 5 are more likely to leave the borough for secondary education. *(See Table 7, overleaf)*

### 2.2.4 Absence and exclusions

Despite improvement over the past 10 years in both authorised and unauthorised absence, Knowsley continues to lag behind the national average with a total absence

of 7.9 per cent compared with 5.1 per cent nationally. *(See Table 8, overleaf)*

There had been a significant increase in the rate of fixed period exclusions between 2009 and 2011, rising from 2.4 per cent of the total school population, below the national average and that of its statistical neighbours, to almost 7 per cent. This trend has since reversed in recent years, although remaining above national trends. *(See Table 9, overleaf)*

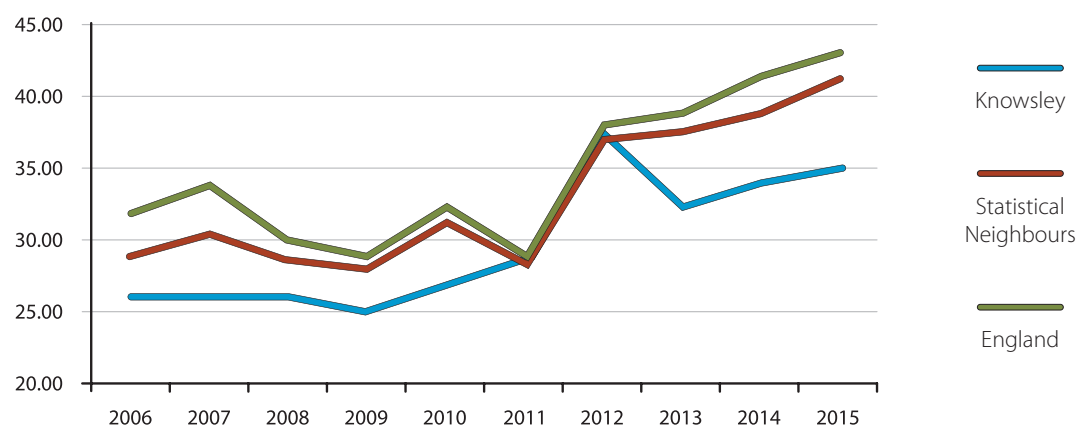
### 2.2.5 Overall trends

The data suggests that provision in early years and primary schools are performing better than the secondary phase of education. There is, however, also evidence that secondary schools in the borough are improving, albeit slowly. There is a need to ensure that overall trends for all phases of education continue to move on an upward trajectory.

We have identified that the better performing pupils (in terms of attaining Level 5 and higher at Key Stage 2) are leaving the borough for their secondary education but that overall attainment at these higher levels in Knowsley's primary schools is below the national average and those of its statistical neighbours. Given the importance of higher Key Stage 2 results in determining subsequent performance at GCSE this implies that primary schools should aim higher and that current trends caution against complacency.

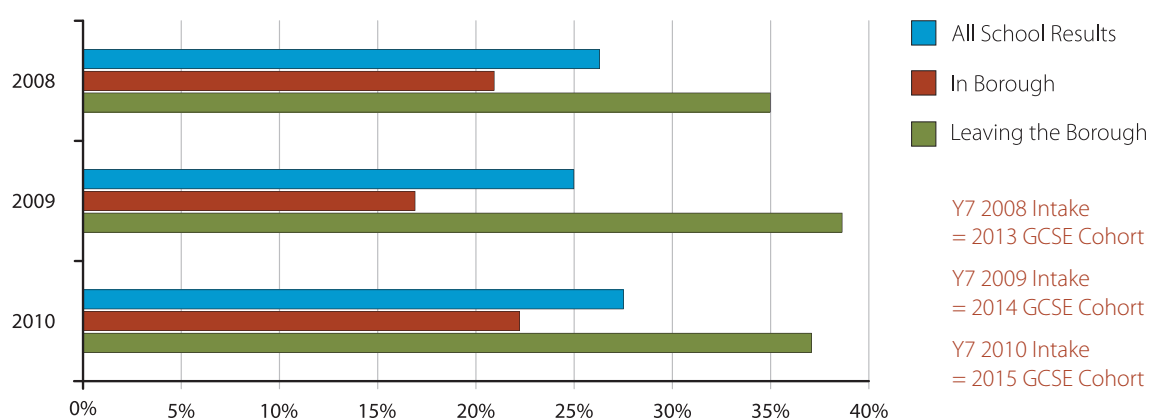
There is also evidence from the Sutton Trust that even where pupils are attaining high at Key Stage 2 a number are continuing to fail at GCSE – the so called 'Missing Talent'. Every year 15 per cent of highly able pupils who score in the top 10 per cent nationally at age 11 fail to achieve in the top 25 per cent at GCSE.<sup>4</sup> This problem is more pronounced amongst some ethnic groups including white British and particularly for disadvantaged pupils (FSM) where the proportion of missing talent more than doubles, as well as boys, who are twice as likely to fall away as girls. As we have discussed Knowsley has relatively few pupils achieving very high KS2 results but it is also within the 20 local authority areas with the highest proportion of Missing Talent.

Table 4: Percentage of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 5+ English



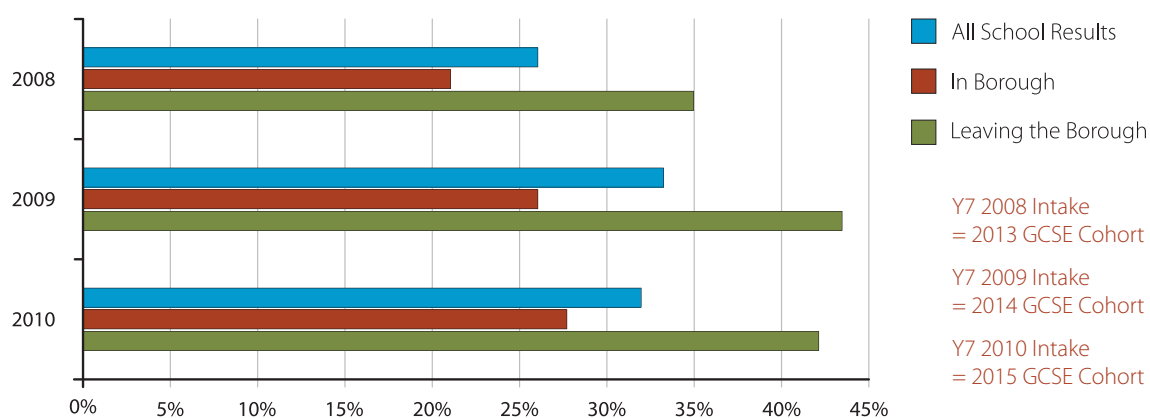
Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

Table 5: Percentage of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 5+ English by GCSE Cohort



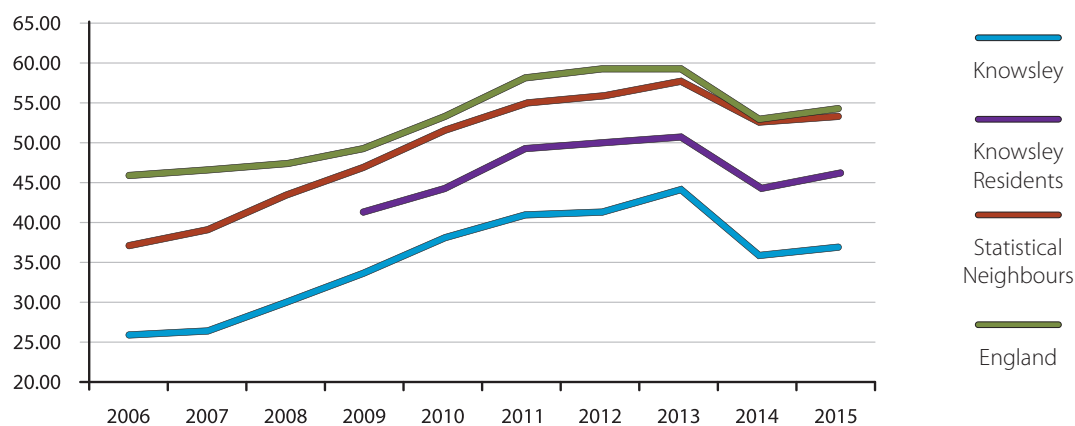
Source: Department for Education, analysed by KMBC, March 2016

Table 6: Percentage of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 5+ Maths by GCSE Cohort



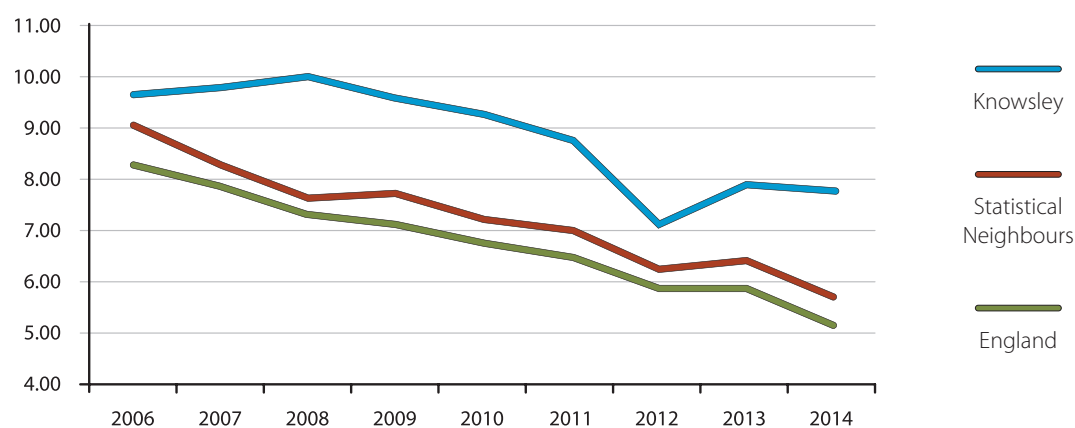
Source: Department for Education, analysed by KMBC, March 2016

Table 7: Achievement of 5+GCSE A\*-C including English & Maths



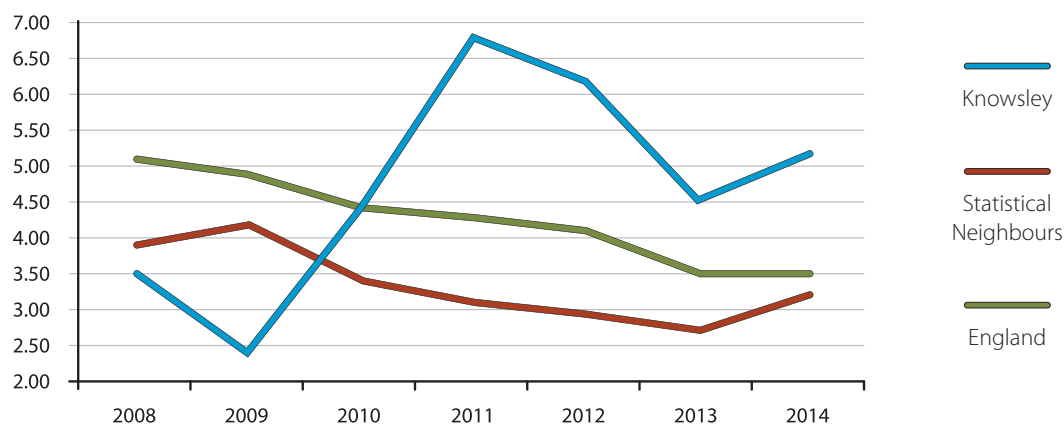
Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

Table 8: Total absence from Secondary Schools - authorised and unauthorised



Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016

Table 9: Number of all school fixed period exclusions as a percentage of school population



Source: Department for Education, Local Authority Information Tool, accessed March 2016



This reinforces the view that all schools in Knowsley, across all phases of provision, must recognise, track and take account of the progress of their most able pupils; to provide the appropriate academic curricula and support to enable highly able pupils to achieve, perhaps by using the Pupil Premium funding to improve the support they are able to give them. Building on the recommendations of the Sutton Trust, Knowsley should consider an 'ask' of Government to ring-fence funding for a local initiative that can support evidence based activities and track pupil progress, under the auspices of the Education Commission.

## 2.3 National and local initiatives

Primary schools in Knowsley have generally been viewed as a success – of the 57 primary schools in the borough eight are currently outstanding and 38 are rated by OfSTED as good (2016). An innovative 'area collaborative' model that enables a clustering of schools to support each other has been in place for more than ten years and has helped deliver improvements in primary education in the borough. This has been developed alongside a strong local authority 'school improvement partnership' framework which has in recent years evolved into a self-improving schools partnership, governed by its own board comprising school area representation and local authority members. A school-led Leadership Hub has also been established to co-ordinate training and support for leadership and management in schools across Knowsley.

The council's approach to secondary school improvement has been to commission external capacity through the use of National Leaders of Education, utilising the expertise of headteachers of 'Outstanding' schools in the region to support and develop strategies for raising standards. External validation both through Ofsted inspections and an independent diagnostic review commissioned by the borough, endorsed the council's approach to secondary school improvement. Yet the longstanding problems of educational performance in the secondary sector have persisted.

The numbers of initiatives to ameliorate this situation have been many. The list of various interventions, tried and tested within the borough, provides a short history of top-down national policy making across several governments. (*See Timeline, overleaf*)

### 2.3.1 Building Schools for the Future

The past 10-15 years have seen a programme of constant change and reorganisation of secondary education provision in the borough. During this period the number of secondary schools has reduced from eleven to six. This has been achieved via a process of mergers and closures and with £157m of capital investment as part of the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme to replace Knowsley's ageing schools with seven new 'Centres for Learning'. Christ the King, one of these new schools for the future has since closed due to falling rolls.

The concept of transformation that emerged in the borough aimed to improve education in every respect, from the outside in. This included replacing old and decrepit buildings with new structures that would redefine how learning spaces would function in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A lot of thinking was of the moment and new design considerations were given to how new technologies and the use of space could facilitate working across the curricula in a themed rather than purely subject based approach. This was a model that resonated with the successes of primary school education in the borough, and which had proven to be successful in the secondary sector elsewhere. These new schools were also designed with the intention that they would function as 'hubs' for wider groupings of schools across the secondary and primary sector, and across the community as a whole.

However, the sheer breadth and scale of change in Knowsley led to immediate difficulties in matching the quality of buildings with educational need. Acoustics were recognised as an early problem, often when different 'classes' were conducted in the same large open space. The need for different types of space were soon identified – where teachers can spend time with one or two students, or rooms that

can accommodate smaller groups, as well as traditional style classrooms and lecture theatres. At the most basic level teachers struggled to contain and control wandering pupils. What was meant to bring world-class education to Knowsley had inadvertently pushed already struggling schools into sharper decline as this period of upheaval corresponded with increasing absenteeism, exclusions and a relative falling away in GCSE results, as the gap widened between schools in the borough and national performance. (*See Tables 8 and 9, opposite*)

Another important feature of this period of change was the difficulty in transforming the existing workforce. TUPE conditions meant that majority of staff were retained and the opportunity to significantly improve the calibre of teaching was not available to the borough. Recruitment problems, particularly in relation to more senior teaching positions maintain. OfSTED reports point to the difficulties which the workforce confronted in stepping up to meet the vision and a general misalignment between school leadership and staff. A focus on alternative provision – BTECS and more vocational training routes – also served to exacerbate problems of attainment in English and Maths and the neglect of national strategies to improve academic attainment that had proven to have worked in neighbouring authorities.

### 2.3.2 The Academy Programme

From 2013 secondary schools in the borough embraced the national policy of academies, with a renewed focus on leadership and the improvement agenda. Of the six remaining secondary schools in the borough, four have now opted to become academies while the remaining two faith schools are under the administration of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Some schools are still managing the effects of mergers and transition in the Borough. Knowsley Park, the most recent school to convert to academy status, absorbed a large intake from the closure of Christ the King which impacted negatively on GCSE results but is gradually managing this through. But the challenges moving forward are to address the aspiration and culture of academic attainment.

1999	Eleven Secondary schools in the borough, with few surplus places.
2001	With falling birth rates and high primary surplus places an independent schools commission was established to provide the principles for a whole-borough school reorganisation across all phases of education.
2002	The Plus One Challenge was introduced to improve every GCSE grade by one.
2003	Three Specialist schools introduced in the topics of sport, languages and performing arts, a policy which had been introduced by the Conservatives and expanded by Labour. The Labour Government also established the Beacon Schools programme, intended to identify high performing schools and to form partnerships with other schools in order to spread best practice. By 2003 nine schools in Knowsley had Beacon status. Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was announced and Knowsley bid for Phase 1 of this initiative with a plan to replace all eleven secondary schools.
2004	The National Strategies programme was introduced with a Key Stage 3 Strategy in place locally and a Leadership incentive Grant (2004-7).
2006	Proposals for Future Schooling in Knowsley published with 7 new Centres for Learning with principles for a transformative curriculum – Towards 21st Century Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>St. Thomas Becket RC Secondary School closes due to falling rolls</li> </ul>
2007-9	Pedagogical framework developed Firm Foundations programme delivers English and Maths KS3/4 targeted interventions and mental toughness / resilience Future Schooling in Knowsley Strategy for Changed Launched. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>St Edmund of Canterbury RC Secondary School converts to Christ the King CfL (2007)</li> <li>Ruffwood Secondary School closes – pupils transfer to Brookfield (2008).</li> <li>Ruffwood becomes Kirkby Sports CfL (2009)</li> <li>Prescot and Higerside Secondary School merge to become Knowsley Park CfL (2008)</li> <li>Knowsley Hey and Bowring Park Secondary Schools merge to become HASCY CfL (2009)</li> <li>St. Edmund Arrowsmith RC Secondary School becomes CfL (2009)</li> <li>Halewood Secondary School becomes Halewood College CfL (2009)</li> <li>All Saints RC Secondary School becomes CfL (2009)</li> </ul>
2010	Coalition formed, BSF suspended, Academies Act passed – Knowsley commits to support Academies route for local schools
2012	Knowsley Corporate Plan pledges £1m to narrow performance gap targeting English and Maths KS3 and KS4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Halewood CfL academy conversion</li> </ul>
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christ the King CfL closes due to falling rolls</li> <li>HASCfL Academy conversion to Lord Derby</li> </ul>
2014	Council review of KS4 outcomes. Education Improvement Strategy developed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kirby Sports CfL converts to Academy status – Kirkby High</li> </ul>
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowsley Park Academy conversion – name reverts to Prescot School</li> </ul>

The secondary academies are all sponsored by strong Multi-Academy Trust based outside the borough:

- Lord Derby Academy is linked to the Dean Trust in Cheshire
- Halewood Academy is linked to the Innovation Enterprise Academy Trust (led by outstanding school, Wade Deacon Academy) in Widnes
- Knowsley Park (to be renamed Prescott School) is linked to the Heath Family Trust, a National Support School and National Teaching School based in Cheshire
- Kirkby High School is linked to Rowan Learning Trust in Wigan

An advantage of the multi-academy model is that Knowsley's academies are well placed to work closely with other schools and share the benefits of teaching expertise and leadership allowing stronger schools to support weaker or smaller ones. In addition to introducing curriculum and pedagogical changes within the school, Academies have also started to focus on the outward facing appearance with the introduction and enforcement of school uniforms. It has been observed that Lord Derby is beginning to

resemble a grammar school in its look and feel. While Knowsley Park is to be renamed as The Prescott School to re-establish links to its former history as grammar school, with a new strap line, 'In the business of learning since 1544'.

The feeling amongst the borough's new emerging academies is that they have now charted a new course and are actively implementing improvement strategies. However, there remain challenges and barriers to achieving academic excellence in the borough. The decision taken by Halewood Academy to close its current sixth form, due to the financial viability of low and falling enrolments, leaves the secondary school sector in the borough without academic A-Level provision. Most pupils continue to study for A-Levels out of the borough, although Knowsley Community College does currently offer it for vocational courses.

Academies are receptive to new approaches that can help improve educational attainment and which are financially viable. There is an argument for a successful Sixth Form Academy to complete an educational

offer beginning with early years and working across both Academy chains and primary-secondary school collaborations. There is also a sense that secondary Academies in Knowsley are now in a better place to engage with this agenda and to consider the original intention of the 'Centres for Learning' to operate as wider community hubs.

It is critical that local leaders have high aspirations for all children in the Borough and appreciate that a quality academic educational offer is part of promoting the long term life chances for young people. High quality academically focussed education is an important part of young people achieving their potential and a prosperous adult future. Local leaders must recognise the work that has taken place and is underway in the Borough's academies and they must support school leaders to hold their nerve in this endeavour.

1 Perera, N., et.al., 'Education in England: Progress and Goals', *Centre Forum*, Mar 2016.

2 Halton, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, South Tyneside, Salford, Gateshead, St.Helens, Redcar and Cleveland, Sunderland, Hartlepool.

3 Data includes State Funded Schools only from 2010.

4 Sutton Trust Research Brief ed. 5, 'Missing Talent', Jun 2015.



## 3. What Works in Education

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*“Setting a high attainment goal for primary pupils at Key Stage 2 (Level 5c or equivalent) is likely to ensure success at Key Stage 4.”*

The factors that can influence educational attainment are potentially very broad. This can range from what directly happens to pupils in schools; the role of parents and how family background can determine aspirations, attitudes and behaviours; and wider societal effects that can contribute to opportunity or disadvantage in the educational experience.

### **3.1 Improving educational attainment in schools**

Urban areas are often associated with poor educational attainment. This is particularly the case in the UK where most of our larger cities are less economically competitive than counterparts in other developed countries and where some of the most difficult social problems are concentrated. Low skills and high levels of worklessness have been a consistent feature of the British urban experience for many generations.

The links between poor educational attainment and economic disadvantage are well established. The ‘attainment gap’, one of the largest among OECD countries (OECD, 2014), is a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility in the UK. The research evidence shows that educational deficits emerge early in children’s lives, even before entry into school. This gap widens as children enter and move through the education system, especially during primary school years, although as we have noted this is not the case for Knowsley.

In general terms, however, the gap is very large by the time young people take their GCSEs. Analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) found that only 21 per cent of the poorest fifth managed to gain five good GCSEs (grades A\*-C, including English and Maths), compared with 75 per cent of the top quintile.<sup>5</sup>

Affluence and disadvantage clearly impact on educational performance, as the research demonstrates, although the UK has weak intergenerational mobility, even when compared to countries with similar income inequality such as Canada and Australia. However, as the turnaround in London’s school system has shown it is possible to close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils in urban areas.

#### **3.1.1 The London Effect**

The so called ‘London Effect’ refers to the extraordinary reversal of fortunes in London’s school system. From the worst performing region in the UK, the attainment and progress of pupils in London is now the highest in the country. Furthermore, the ‘London Effect’ is strongest for poor pupils, defined in terms of those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of inner London. Over 50 per cent of FSM pupils achieve 5 GCSEs in London compared with 25 per cent in England. Understanding why the outcomes for London schools have been improving so much faster than in the rest of the country and how these effects

can be transferred to other places has been one of the biggest questions in education policy over the past few years.

One of the many reasons cited for the success of London's schools is the contribution of effective public policy that has contributed to a culture of innovation. Research conducted by the Centre for London (2014) identified four key school improvement interventions that provided the impetus for improvement – London Challenge, Teach First, the academies programme and improved support from local authorities. The success of these linked initiatives, it is claimed, depended upon effective leadership at every level of the system.<sup>6</sup>

However, other studies, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and Institute of Education (IOE) study for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, have shown that improvement in performance has been present in London since the mid 1990s long before many of the main policy interventions (and additional resources) were introduced.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that such policies have not made a positive difference to increasing levels of attainment but many of these interventions have taken place at secondary level, while the evidence suggests that the main shift in performance is likely to have already occurred during the primary phase of education.

The research evidence suggests pre-school is important in addressing inequalities since the gap emerges early in children's development. However, at age 3 children in London are behind the rest of the UK in English language skills. This can be accounted for by the high proportion of children from families where English is a second language. The IFS/IOE study makes clear that by age 5 London has no advantage over the rest of England, in terms of functional language (although other studies have identified that London is ahead in terms of the percentage of children achieving good level of development<sup>8</sup>). And yet by age 11 London pupils are ahead. Higher level attainment at KS2 (in English and Maths) is helping to reduce other negative contributions associated with disadvantaged pupils.

London has a more diverse ethnic population than other parts of the country and it has been assumed that education is more valued amongst immigrant families and has consequently contributed to the uplift in London's educational performance. One study states that the effect is straightforward since London has a much lower proportion of the lowest performing ethnic group (i.e. White British pupils) than the rest of the country. Further because of a more socially and ethnically integrated school system, more white British pupils have the opportunity for interactions in school with higher-scoring ethnic minority pupils than those outside the capital do. Consequentially there is potential for peer effect spill-overs causing higher pupil progress. A key part of the London effect is its attraction to migrants and those aspiring to a better life.<sup>9</sup>

However, a more recent quantitative study by the LSE has identified that ethnicity can explain a relatively small proportion – approximately 1/6<sup>th</sup> of overall improved performance, pointing out that while attainment may have improved the underlying composition of London's population has not changed over the same period. Furthermore improvement has occurred amongst all disadvantaged pupils across all ethnic groups including amongst the white working class in parts of outer London which are less ethnically diverse.<sup>10</sup>

The same LSE study also examined for other factors such as:

- School competition – there is a high level of choice and competition in London but the study found these had weak effects on attainment
- Class sizes – these are bigger in London, particularly between the age 7-11, but again these were not found to have a big effect
- Teacher pay – there was no evidence of London weighting having a significant impact
- Peer group effects, parental investments and other spill overs from a more diverse socio-economic composition were not considered to have a significant impact

- Type of school or governance structure, especially in primary school, were shown to make little difference in improvements, although disadvantaged London pupils are more likely to attend voluntary church schools

Some of the research relating to the London effect is contradictory and often counter-intuitive. It is hard to dismiss the particular mix of socio-economic and demographic characteristics that can be found in catchment areas for London schools, or the effect that the housing market and the ongoing process of gentrification has on parent choices and ultimately improving schools. There is high demand for schools in London and where schools are over subscribed 'Fair banding' – where children applying to a secondary school take a test and are then divided into ability bands – are increasing. This can contribute to creating more balanced and comprehensive intakes than would otherwise be the case, although it may also be contributing to a more selective system. The latest survey, by Comprehensive Future, of admissions criteria in England found only 39 per cent of schools in inner London do not select on the basis of faith or tests, compared with 82 per cent in Yorkshire and Humber.

In addition it is also clear that London has benefited from additional resources. Overall funding for the London Challenge scheme was £80 million in total over the full eight years between 2003 and 2011. Schools in the north of England continue to receive, on average, less funding per pupil than those in London (£900 less per pupil in primary schools and £1,300 less in secondary).<sup>11</sup> It is, however, also true that overheads, salaries (London Weighting) and all services will cost more in London.

The Capital has many advantages over the rest of England and there are clearly 'enabling' factors contributing to performance in London. However, what the evidence indicates is that it is contact with schools that makes the difference in reversing a performance gap between early years and Key Stage 2 and in narrowing the gap between affluent and disadvantaged pupils. This points to improvements in the quality of London's Schools above other external factors.

### 3.1.2 What works in closing the gap

There is a large body of evidence about what works in improving educational attainment in the UK and abroad. A recent systematic review of evidence conducted for the Education Endowment Foundation identified the importance of school level actions in closing the attainment gap.<sup>12</sup> These include:

- Effective leadership
- A clear focus on improving learning
- Agreed structures and processes in school
- The importance of quality teaching - staff skills and professional development
- Making learning challenging
- Ensuring effective relationships for teaching and learning
- Building partnerships around the school.

In general terms most schools, including failing schools, would recognise these components and to varying degrees would think that they are currently putting this into practice. However, as the research identifies, it is difficult to isolate the difference that individual approaches make or to translate general messages into specific practice. Since most approaches work for the majority of learners most approaches can therefore increase the gap, as the advantaged are further advantaged. Reducing the gap as opposed to raising overall attainment is therefore a significant and particular challenge.

Research for the Department for Education by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2015) found that schools are using a large number of strategies (18 per school, on average) in order to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. More successful schools appeared to be implementing their strategies in greater depth and with more attention to detail. By comparing more and less successful schools, the study identified seven building blocks for success.

1. Promote an ethos of attainment for all pupils, rather than stereotyping disadvantaged pupils as a group with less potential to succeed.

School Level Characteristics Influencing Performance with Disadvantaged Pupils	
Schools with Lower Performance	Schools with Higher Performance
Higher levels of pupil absence	Pupils with higher results at Key Stage 2
Larger year groups overall	Higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils
Higher proportions of pupils with special educational needs	Location in London or South East
Higher proportion of pupils from white British ethnic backgrounds	Converter academies, Sponsored academies at secondary level and small academy groups at secondary level.
Sponsored academies at primary level	Selective schools and Teaching Schools

2. Have an individualised approach to addressing barriers to learning and emotional support, at an early stage.

3. Focus on high quality teaching first rather than on bolt-on strategies and activities outside school hours.

4. Focus on outcomes for individual pupils rather than on providing strategies.

5. Deploy the best staff to support disadvantaged pupils; develop skills and roles of teachers and Teaching Assistants rather than using additional staff who do not know the pupils well.

6. Make decisions based on data and respond to evidence, using frequent, rather than one-off assessment and decision points.

7. Have clear, responsive leadership: setting ever higher aspirations and devolving responsibility for raising attainment to all staff, rather than accepting low aspirations and variable performance.

School leaders emphasise that there is no single intervention or 'one size fits all' solution that has led to success. However, those strategies that schools considered to be the most effective, focused on teaching

and learning, especially: paired or small group additional teaching; improving feedback; and one-to-one tuition. These strategies are all supported by evidence of effectiveness in the Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

The NFER study found that between one and two thirds of the variance in attainment can be explained by a number of school-level characteristics. (*See Table, above*)

This suggests that schools' intake, structure and circumstance are influential but they do not totally determine pupils' outcomes. It therefore implies that schools have meaningful scope to make a difference. Schools that were 'early adopters' in the improvement journey are more likely to have put the basics in place (especially addressing attendance and behaviour, setting high expectations, focusing on the quality of teaching and developing the role of Teaching Assistants) and moved on to more specific and sophisticated improvement strategies. Leaders in more successful schools report that it takes a period of around three to five years to see the impact of changes feed through to pupils' results.



### From 'Levels' to 'Age Related Expectations'

The measurement of attainment at Key Stage 2 is undergoing substantial change. The previous longstanding system measured ability in reading, writing and maths using levels and sub-levels (e.g. 4c, 4b, 4a, 5...). It also established minimum floor targets for attainment. The new measurement system is constructed around 'age-related expectation' and achieving or exceeding that. The new system is yet to bed down. However, feedback from Knowsley officials involved in the transition from the old to the new measurement model indicate that the new minimum – 'achieving expectations' – will likely be more demanding than achieving the old minimum (i.e. 4c).

Our analysis and recommendations reflect historical data using the old levels-based measurements. The key point, that surpassing the nationally mandated minimum is the best route to achievement at GCSE, remains true regardless of measurement system.

The UK research suggests that a number of measures are required, tailored to each school's circumstances and stage of development. These measures include setting a culture of high expectations for all pupils, understanding how schools can make a difference, selecting a range of evidence-based strategies tailored to meet the needs of individual schools and pupils, and implementing them well. The evidence from London suggests that schools in the capital are more likely to have been 'early adopters'.

There is also growing consensus among many experts that setting a high attainment goal for primary pupils of Level 5c (or 'Age Related Expectations' equivalent) at Key Stage 2 is likely to ensure success at Key Stage 4. Analysis indicates that the chances of achieving a Grade C or higher at GCSE increases significantly if a pupil achieves a Level 4b across Reading, Writing and Maths at primary, compared to a lower Level 4c.<sup>13</sup> (See Box, above)

### 3.1.3 Selective schools

The Government's Green Paper 'Schools that work for everyone' has re-introduced the prospect of expanding the selective school system.

The evidence shows that selective schools outperform all other schools in the secondary state sector. In 2015 virtually

all pupils in grammar schools achieved five or more good passes at GCSE or equivalent compared to around two-thirds at comprehensives. The gap is larger when qualifications are restricted to GCSEs only and when the measure has to include English and maths. At least 95% of pupils achieved 5+ GCSEs or equivalent at A\*-C in all but two grammar schools in 2015; all pupils achieved this standard in just under half of grammars in the same year.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, disadvantaged pupils attending grammar schools in England are more likely to achieve in line with their non-disadvantaged peers. The results for 2015 show that, for pupils eligible for free school meals who attend a selective school, there is a narrower gap in their attainment compared to non-eligible children than is the case for England as a whole. In selective schools, 96.4 per cent of non-FSM pupils were successful, compared with nearly 92.7 per cent of FSM pupils. That gap of 3.7 percentage points is considerably lower than the gap across all schools of 27 percentage points.

Recent analysis by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) has identified that higher grammar school performance is driven by the high prior attainment and socio-economic profile of pupils. EPI claim that once these factors are taken into consideration there is no difference in

overall attainment. However, the data shows that although high prior attainment does narrow the attainment gap FSM pupils with high prior achievement in grammars perform higher (by almost 10 percentage points) than FSM pupils with high prior achievement in non-selective schools.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main criticisms of the selective system is that not enough pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are attending grammar schools. It was the 1944 Education Act which first introduced free grammar school places on the basis of performance in a competitive exam, the 11+. But for a complex number of reasons, grammar schools failed to improve prospects for children from less well off backgrounds. Many poorer families needed their children to earn a wage and not remain in secondary education. They had not bought into the aspirations of the professional classes. By the late 1960s labour had shifted education policy towards the comprehensive system.

At their peak around one-quarter of all pupils in state secondaries attended grammars schools. The proportion has, since the late 1970's, been less than 5 per cent. Research undertaken by Sutton Trust has identified that of the current 163 grammar schools in England less than 3 per cent of all entrants are eligible for free school meals – on average as few as 11 pupils per grammar school – whereas almost 13 per cent of entrants come from outside the state sector, largely from fee-paying preparatory schools.<sup>16</sup>

The research also shows that in local authorities that operate the grammar system, children who are not eligible for free school meals have a much greater chance of attending a grammar school than similarly high achieving children (as measured by their Key Stage 2 test scores) who are eligible for free school meals. In selective local authorities, 66 per cent of children who achieve level 5 in both English and Maths at Key Stage 2 who are not eligible for free school meals go to a grammar school compared with 40 per cent of similarly high achieving children who are eligible for free school meals.

Further analysis undertaken by the Financial Times reveals that in the Local Authorities

where the grammar school system still exists (e.g. Kent, Buckinghamshire, Medway and Lincolnshire) poorer children do worse than non-selective areas. This is because selective areas attract higher achieving non-FSM pupils from wider areas, thus distorting the gap, as EPI have explained. At the same time selective schools in these authorities demonstrate less value in so far as non-FSM pupils do not achieve as high as perhaps should be expected given their relative advantages and that when these factors are considered selective authorities are actually performing no better than high performing counterparts in non-selective areas.<sup>17</sup>

What the evidence would appear to indicate is that grammar schools do not especially advantage high performing middle class children, although they do help to narrow the attainment gap for those disadvantaged pupils who attend them. However, the overall selective system is not addressing social mobility, since too few disadvantaged children are attending grammar schools to make a significant difference. In addition those places with a two-tier system of grammar and secondary modern are not performing well for the overall cohort of FSM pupils or providing value for non-FSM pupils who would otherwise do just as well in the non-selective system.

The Sutton Trust has recommended a number of steps to improve access to grammar schools for pupils of all backgrounds, including:

- Increasing outreach work to ensure that low income pupils sit the 11-plus tests
- Giving disadvantaged students the opportunity to prepare for the tests so they can compete on a more level playing field with students who may have received intensive tutoring
- Working to make the tests as fair as possible and taking steps to “tutor-proof” them
- Giving priority to pupils with good test results who are in receipt of the pupil premium.

The Trust also believes that it is crucial that more is done in comprehensive schools to support highly able pupils, particularly

those from lower income backgrounds, who fall behind by the time they get to their GCSEs. For grammar schools to enable social mobility, it is essential to ensure that middle class parents can not exploit the system – to provide an entrance exam that does not advantage the ‘tutored’, allowing for a level playing field – and that those children who fail to pass the entry exam are not abandoned to a second rate education.

### 3.1.4 Effective overseas programmes

There is a range of overseas evidence, mainly from the United States that identifies effective interventions in closing the education gap and which has had an influence on policy making in the UK. The US Head Start Programme, originally launched in the mid 1960s, and still operating, informed the UK’s SureStart initiative to provide comprehensive early childhood education, health, parental support and improved childcare to low-income children and their families. The evaluation evidence from the US is mixed but generally positive. As with the UK programme the extent to which a discernible impact can be measured continues to be a controversial issue.<sup>18</sup>

Charter Schools are another US model, first instituted in law in the 1990’s, which have had a significant influence on education policy in England through the introduction of Academies and free schools. Again the evidence for charter schools is inconclusive, although some have achieved remarkable results. Some recent studies have shown that the average charter school student outperforms their peers in traditional schools; however older studies have found no difference. A meta-analysis of the research literature in the US found a high degree of variation across schools, geographical locations and grade spans.<sup>19</sup>

However, Charter Schools belonging to the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP Schools) have proven to be a general exception providing evidence of large positive effects. KIPP schools are open-enrolment (that is first come first served) state schools, serving primarily low-income and minority families. Nationally, more than 87 per cent of KIPP students are eligible for the federal

free or reduced-price meals program, and 96 per cent are African-American or Latino. KIPP Schools are founded on a core set of principles known as the ‘Five Pillars’, including:

- 1. HIGH EXPECTATIONS** - With clearly defined and measurable high expectations for academic achievement and conduct.
- 2. CHOICE & COMMITMENT** - Students, their parents, and the faculty of each KIPP school choose to participate in the program. No one is assigned or forced to attend a KIPP school.
- 3. MORE TIME** - With an extended school day, week, and year, students have more time in the classroom to acquire the academic knowledge and skills that will prepare them for college.
- 4. POWER TO LEAD** - The principals of KIPP schools have control over their school budget and personnel. They are free to swiftly make spending or staffing changes.
- 5. FOCUS ON RESULTS** - KIPP schools relentlessly focus on high student performance on standardised tests and other objective measures, using frequent teacher feedback and use of data to guide instruction.

One US study estimates that these factors explain up to 45 per cent of variation in outcomes and finds that traditionally input measures – class size, per pupil expenditure, level of teacher qualifications - are not correlated with school effectiveness.<sup>20</sup>

In addition the development of character is as important to KIPP Schools as the teaching of rigorous academic skills. KIPP’s innovative approach to character work is grounded in Positive Psychology and focuses on seven highly predictive character strengths that are correlated to leading engaged, happy and successful lives: zest, grit, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity.

The evidence from KIPP schools is impressive. As of 2015, 45 per cent of KIPP students have earned a four-year college degree after finishing eighth grade at a KIPP middle school ten or more years ago.



This is above the national average for all students (34 per cent), and five times the rate for students from low-income families nationwide (9 per cent).

Critics of KIPP Schools have observed that the admission process self-screens for students who are motivated and compliant. The 2010 Mathematica Policy Research study found that KIPP schools had a “lower concentration of special education and limited English proficiency students than the public schools from which they draw.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, some KIPP schools show high rates of attrition, especially for those students entering the schools with the lowest test scores.

While we in the UK have been looking elsewhere for models of best practice in closing the education gap commentators in the US have been seeking to learn lessons from the ‘London Effect’. The Brookings Institute have identified how in London reforms have been ‘district wide’ rather than just targeting isolated low performing schools; that strong local leadership and broader accountability systems at district level have a vitally important role to play; and the role that districts can play in assuring that individual schools have the resources and capacity they need. These are interesting observations about the perceived benefits of local authority control which will be further diminished as all schools in England convert to Academy status.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2 The role of parenting

Parents have a profound impact on their children’s attainment in formal schooling. Research reviews have consistently found that “parents have significant impacts on students’ learning and developmental processes.”<sup>23</sup> Parental involvement in their children’s education from an early age “has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.”<sup>24</sup> The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project is a large-scale longitudinal study of 3,000 children, which has followed the progress of these children from the age of three. It found that parents’

involvement in home learning activities makes an important difference to children’s attainment (and social behaviour) at age three through to the age of 10, even when the influence of other background factors have been taken into account (such as family socio-economic status, mothers’ education, income and ethnicity).<sup>25</sup>

The key questions and issues in considering how parental involvement relates to improving attainment in the Borough’s schools include:

- The early years: supporting parents as a young child’s first teacher
- Formal schooling
- Involvement or engagement
- Types of activity
- What does good parental engagement by schools look like?
- Is improving attainment necessarily dependent on parental involvement or can improvements be made solely through in-school changes?

#### 3.2.1 The early years: supporting parents as the first teacher

As we note above, children’s education begins in the home in infancy, as very young children’s neural networks are forged through interaction with warm, responsive and familiar carers, through play, support for early communication and through exposure to sensory stimulation. For children in disadvantaged families, the stresses that can particularly come with poverty can hinder this kind of learning relationship and learning environment.<sup>26</sup> By the age of three, poorer children are estimated to be, on average, nine months behind children from wealthier backgrounds.<sup>27</sup>

There is a range of research that shows young middle class children are spoken to more and hear a wider vocabulary than their working class peers.<sup>28</sup> In his recent book on class and social mobility, the American academic and social capital specialist Robert Putnam identifies class differences in family dynamics that support a strong home learning environment in college educated households. He observes that children of college-educated parents receive 50 per cent more of “Goodnight

Moon” time (a popular book for infants). By this he means reading to, talking to and generally spending quality time with their children. This was not the case a generation ago; in the 1970s the class difference was much narrower.<sup>29</sup> Such difference in early learning environments has knock effects on school readiness.

In recognition of this crucial developmental role for parents (and other close, frequent carers such as grandparents), consultation with senior Knowsley MBC officers in Early Help outlined how the network of children’s centres is now focussing on the 0-2 years cohort. This is because the 2+ years cohort is already well provided for, through the extension of free day nursery places from 2 years, and provision in the Borough is well established and good quality. A range of structured courses (~12 weeks) are offered via children’s centres to support infant and toddler development (eg baby massage, sensory play), foster the bonding between parent/carer and child necessary for strong, functional relationships in the future and which track the child’s development against the Early Years Foundation Stage milestones to monitor and flag any developmental issues.

High quality early years education (pre-school) is part of the approach to redress this imbalance. Recent brain research and research on cognitive development are “reinforcing evidence that early education is crucial in getting children off to a good start in life.”<sup>30</sup> Free provision has now been extended down to 2 years for disadvantaged families because the evidence strongly points to the need to supplement young children’s home learning environment in order to support their development.

Recent local government cuts are threatening early years and children’s centre provision. Schools budgets by contrast have been protected up to now. Given the strong links between school readiness and early years provision, there is scope to consider categorising early years as a core component of the education offer, and for it to consequently receive similar protections to 4+ education.

### 3.2.2 Formal schooling: parental engagement

Once children enter formal schooling, parental involvement and engagement is recognised as a key element in children and young people's attainment. It has a large and positive impact on children's learning. A DCSF research review noted that:

*"Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups."*<sup>31</sup>

#### Activity supporting attainment

Parental involvement represents a wide variety of parental behaviours and practices, so it is worth unpacking the terms 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement'. Parents' role in relation to school can be described in two broad categories:

- *Involvement* in the life of the school, such as governors, PTA, participating in trips
- *Engagement* in support of the individual child's learning at home
- Some of the behaviours and practices that span these two categories include:
  - Parents' participation in school functions
  - Parent- school communication
  - Parental advising (i.e. parent-student communications)
  - Parental aspiration for students' postsecondary education
  - Family rules reflecting parental home supervision (e.g. bedtime)
  - Parental participation in extracurricular activities, and
  - Learning at home and supervision (homework, limiting television).<sup>32</sup>

The large scale, longitudinal Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study found that a range of activities are associated with positive outcomes at age 3 and 7 including playing with letters and numbers, emphasising the alphabet,

reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing and visiting the library.<sup>33</sup>

Parents are their child's primary advocate. Parents also engage in the child's education in an ongoing way through regular contact with the teacher and school to monitor progress, flag issues, seek and lobby for additional support, personalised approaches or support for particular talents and interests.

Other ways parents can be engaged with their child's education is by using their financial, social and cultural resources to attain the desired education for their child and enable participation in wider enrichment activities. The Sutton Trust study, *Parent Power? Using money and information to boost children's chances of educational success*, identified how more middle class families are able to buy private tutoring to support entrance exams, move house to access the catchment of a high-performing school, or pay for additional travel costs.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the study highlighted the use of enrichment activities, such as attending plays and concerts, museum and gallery visits, and regular out of school classes (e.g. sports, music and drama), that support in-school achievement through providing a broader understanding and range of experiences.

Schools, local education authorities and local community services can work to generate greater parental engagement. Two particularly effective methods are parenting programmes and family learning. The literature shows that, in fact, particularly effective programmes are those that target two or more child/ family outcomes (such as behaviour *and* literacy), that include both parent and child together, with a focus on enhancing interactions and where parents are taught ways to support their child's literacy.<sup>35</sup>

In their review of evidence on family support programmes and their impact on attainment, Siraj Blatchford et al name some of the programmes having evidence of beneficial social, developmental and academic impact: Webster Stratton Incredible Years, Peers Early Education Programme and Enhanced Triple P Positive Parenting.<sup>36</sup> Primary Heads interviewed for this research reported that they offer Webster Stratton and Triple P for parents.

Family learning is one particular mechanism that has both a positive impact on children's attainment and which promotes greater engagement of parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Family learning broadly refers to approaches which engage parents and children jointly in learning:

*"Family learning' refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family."*

In this way, family learning programmes "could be considered as a bridge between informal home learning and formal school learning".<sup>37</sup> This can include literacy and numeracy programmes to improve the basic skills of parents and the early literacy of children and may include joint parent/child sessions to support early reading skills.<sup>38</sup>

An evaluation of literacy and numeracy programmes, which examined achievement before and after the courses found:

- A significant improvement in reading age among children beginning primary school. Finding that a one year intervention showed an average improvement of six months of reading age, on top of the development expected for children of their age.<sup>39</sup>
- Teachers felt that children who had participated in family learning schemes settled better in class and had improved relationships, as well as being more self-confident and improving their communication and interpersonal skills.<sup>40</sup>
- An evaluation of family literacy and numeracy programmes found statistically significant improvements in literacy skills for parents. A follow-up study two years later found that these skills gains were sustained.<sup>41</sup>
- A large proportion of parents participating in a programme for disadvantaged families reported that they were better able to support their children's learning and development.<sup>42</sup>

### Supporting aspiration

Aspirations for the future are recognised as a key determinant for educational success.<sup>43</sup> The kinds of behaviours outlined above not only support academic learning, but also signal to the child that education in general, as well as their personal progress in learning and their wider development, are valued. Research shows that students who perceived that their parents valued their education and had high expectations were likely to feel interested and engaged and confident towards their academic endeavours and see themselves as active and competent learners.<sup>44</sup>

However, there is a complex relationship between attainment and achievement. Although aspirations significantly predict attainment, regardless of socio-economic background, they may be stronger predictors of achievement for young people from more advantaged (socio-economic) backgrounds. High levels of parental education is significantly related to having higher expectations of children's achievement and it is "also likely that parents with higher education have higher attaining children for whom they have higher expectations for their children".<sup>45</sup>

This points to the outcome that, whilst high parental and pupil aspirations may lessen the effects of low socio-economic background, there are systemic issues at play that lead to an 'aspiration - achievement gap'.<sup>46</sup> There is also evidence that some groups (in particular girls, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and some ethnic minorities) may be more likely than others to experience this gap between their aspirations and educational achievement.

#### 3.2.3 Which parents are engaged?

There is a substantial body of research identifying that not all parents are equally likely to be highly involved in their children's school and engaged in supporting their children's education in the home. In Britain, there are differences in levels of involvement and engagement along class and ethnicity lines.

A Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007) study found that Black parents are more than twice as likely as White parents to say they felt very involved in their child's education. Parents from non-White ethnic backgrounds are also more involved in their child's school activities (including homework). Parents from non-White backgrounds are also less likely to say that a child's education is the school's responsibility rather than the parent's (17 per cent of Black and Asian parents compared to 27 per cent of White parents said that it was the school's responsibility).<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting these findings, a 2011 review of best practice in parental engagement found that Black parents were more than twice as likely to be involved in the PTA (43 per cent compared to 20 per cent). Research cited in the review gave the startling statistic that Black parents were 136 per cent more likely than White parents to say that they were very involved in their children's education. Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British parents were more likely than White parents to state that it was extremely important to help with homework (84 per cent, 82 per cent and 72 per cent respectively).<sup>48</sup>

Examining the class element, the Sutton Trust study examined differential use of parental strategies in support of education. These strategies included careful selection of school, regular communication with the school and teacher, help with homework, enrichment activities and private tutoring. There were "statistically significant differences by social group in use of most of the parental strategies and behaviours relating to their children's education, with middle class parents (and particularly those in social groups A and B) more likely to adopt strategies that would increase their child's chances of educational success".<sup>49</sup>

Knowsley's population is both White and predominantly in the lower social groups. This character makes high levels of parent involvement and engagement less likely.

#### 3.2.4 What does good parental engagement look like?

A recent research review identified the following key features as essential for successful parental engagement:

- Planning
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Sustained improvement.<sup>50</sup>

Parental engagement works best when parents, staff and pupils are included in the planning process.<sup>51</sup> This planning process should include a comprehensive needs analysis and ensure that engagement activities are incorporated into the school's learning process, and not seen as a 'bolt-on' service with no clear intended impact on pupils' learning.<sup>52</sup>

Interventions targeted at particular groups of parents are also more likely to be effective. As a report from Estyn points out, schools should recognise that parents want to be directly involved with their child's education;<sup>53</sup> those parents classified as 'hard to reach' are often those who feel the school is 'hard to reach' and in planning parental engagement schools must be especially proactive in reaching those parents.

Since active collaboration with parents is integral for successful parental engagement, parents need to be involved in decision making. The best schemes recognise the contributions parents can make and aim to empower them.<sup>54</sup> There are many demands on parents' time and it is important that schools are sensitive and responsive to their needs. Parents report that work commitments are the largest barrier to parental engagement, but simple measures such as flexible arrangements for parents' evenings can help overcome such barriers. This sort of proactive response from schools also indicates to parents that the school holds their opinions in high regard and can facilitate further parental engagement.<sup>55</sup>

A strategy of parental engagement should be the product of on-going work, support and development. In order to achieve sustained academic improvement, parental engagement must be a part of schools' long-term planning process and staff should consistently monitor its progress and report back to other staff. School staff can determine what works and where improvement is needed by constantly collecting and monitoring data of parental engagement. This data can also be used

to inform other schools with similar communities which parental engagement strategies are effective.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2.5 Parental involvement: necessary or nice to have?

While the research shows that it is undoubtedly the case that keen parental engagement has a key role to play in attainment, not all school communities can draw on a body of active, supportive and 'sharp elbowed' parents clamouring for the needs of their child and willing to work with the school. Knowsley, in common with many areas in England that have concentrations of White working class populations, experiences challenges in ensuring local parents are willing and able to be actively engaged in their child's education. In response to the issue of lack of parental engagement, some educational philosophies have sought to work around or otherwise bypass parents and expand the role of the school to the point that it becomes a surrogate parent. In this way, good schooling comes before parental support, not the other way around.

Mossbourne Community Academy in the London Borough of Hackney is a flagship for turning around education provision in a very poor performing area of the capital. Its founding Head, Sir Michael Wilshaw, is emphatic that, where there are parent populations who cannot or will not, be active participants in supporting a learning environment, schools should take on that mantle:

*"Schools can step into the vacuum and make a difference; even if this means being unfashionable, counter-cultural, standing up to parents and setting good examples where few exist at home. I have often said that schools in the most difficult circumstances have no option but to be surrogate parents so that children can achieve, and I don't retreat from that position."<sup>57</sup>*

Mossbourne Community Academy's excellent results are the outcome of a number of factors. It is, however, well known for its uncompromising focus on discipline and high standards of behaviour as foundation stones for high achievement.

Sir Michael is bullish in support of this traditional approach and of the approach to being explicit about the school's expectations of parents and the consequences of their lack of engagement:

*"We should remind parents of their obligation to be a good parent — coming to open evenings, making sure your child does homework. If a parent consistently doesn't do that, I think headteachers should have the power to fine that parent."<sup>58</sup>*

In an American context, the Knowledge is Power Program schools take a similarly firm approach. Each student and parent (and teacher) signs a contract committing to attendance, involvement and active participation in the school. KIPP schools have pursued an assertive approach to teaching and learning which has not always been popular with parents. Indeed, KIPP school leaders have been reported as taking rather drastic steps to improve learning, over the heads of parents – for example confiscating the family television for a student who persistently failed to complete homework.<sup>59</sup> There is much debate over the "no excuses" philosophy of the KIPP schools, perceptions of an overly disciplinarian approach and the means by which they achieve high attainment ends.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, their success in national testing regimes and onwards destinations at prestigious colleges is evidence that parental engagement is not a necessary first element for high attainment in disadvantaged areas.

## 3.3 Community anchors

### 3.3.1 Schools as community anchors

Part of the web of support that surrounds a child and student is the network of services and community organisations that contribute broadly to wellbeing. Community centres, or community 'anchors', often provide a focus for both public service delivery and wider voluntary community activity.

A 'community anchor' can be described as an "independent, community-run and led organisation, rooted in a sense of place

and with a mission to improve things for the whole community, not simply a part of it"<sup>61</sup> At an operational level, an anchor institution is an organisation, "which has a key stake in a place. It will have significant levels of spend and numbers of jobs, and is extremely unlikely to leave due to market forces".<sup>62</sup> Schools, with their physical assets in buildings, halls and grounds, plus strong organisational structures, large numbers of staff often drawn from the local population and their nature as a long standing institution and focus for the community, are therefore well-placed to play the role.

### 3.3.2 Community schools

In the US, the community schools movement seeks to do exactly this: use the institutional strength of schools in disadvantaged areas as a focus of development for the wider community and to support the attainment of children entering and participating in the schools. (In this context 'community school' is distinct from the English definition of 'community school' as a grant maintained school operating in the state based system). The Coalition for Community Schools defines a community school as:

*"A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends."<sup>63</sup>*

The focus on community schooling in disadvantaged areas is based on the premise that "disadvantages that have multiple causes need to be tackled by comprehensive approaches...In these contexts, teachers and school administrators have to deal with barriers that originate outside schools."<sup>64</sup> In this way, the school is a hub for both learning and development.

The Building Schools for the Future programme included a community development aspect to what was otherwise a major capital and construction programme:

*“The Department sees BSF as important to improving educational attainment and the life chances available to children, by providing educational, recreational and social environments that support modern teaching and learning methods. It wants buildings to be shared and used by local communities, and to be flexible in responding to developing needs.”<sup>65</sup>*

### Extended schools

In England, the Extended Schools policy was one attempt to institute the community schools concept. The Extended Schools initiative was intended to make schools a focal point for their community by offering a wide range of services and activities, with the ‘core offer’ consisting of:

- A varied menu of activities including study support, play/recreation, sport, music, arts and craft, volunteering, and entrepreneurial activities
- Childcare from 8am – 6pm for 48 weeks per year for primary schools
- Parenting support including family learning
- Swift and easy access to targeted and specialist support services such as speech and language therapy, and
- Community access to facilities including adult learning, ICT, and sports facilities.<sup>66</sup>

Eventually, the term ‘extended schools’ was supplanted by ‘extended services’ and schools were now expected simply to facilitate access to such services offered by other institutions. These services were often provided in off-site community settings rather than school settings.<sup>67</sup> There was a great deal of freedom in the types of services that were offered, the most popular being breakfast clubs, sports and after school clubs.

After the Coalition Government came to power in 2010, the Extended Schools

Initiative was abolished and its funding diverted into the general school budget. This was an attempt to give schools more freedom to decide how to spend their own resources. The Government indicated that Pupil Premium funds could be used to continue extended services, but that each school had autonomy in how it intended to use the funding.<sup>68</sup>

There is an argument for re-evaluating the use and effectiveness of the Pupil Premium. The National Audit Office, in its examination of the Premium, noted that while the fund has potential, it has not yet had substantial impact. The attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils has narrowed “but no clear trend has been established and the gap remains wide.”<sup>69</sup> Some schools, the NAO found, don’t appropriately focus funding on disadvantaged pupils, and some spend funds on activities which are not demonstrably effective. The Sutton Trust’s research revealed that, while the impact has been significant in individual schools, progress remains slow at a national level, in part due to inconsistent use of evidence to apply the Premium strategically.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.3.3 Community schools - impact on attainment

#### *Impact of community schools*

The intended outcomes of community schools are to raise educational performance, lower drop-out rates and reduce risky behaviours, such as alcohol and drug use, unprotected sex and crime.<sup>71</sup> Despite the significant increase in community schools in the US in recent years, there is a limited evidence base exploring and measuring the impact of the community schools model.<sup>72</sup>

Where the evidence does exist it suggests that the most disadvantaged pupils are those who benefit most from community schools.<sup>73</sup> A study in Harlem, New York, found that a comprehensive community school strategy including extending school hours and term times and integrating mental and physical health services within schools did have a positive impact on closing attainment-gaps in mathematics and English.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, beyond individual success stories such as this there is limited evidence that community schools greatly raise educational performance overall.<sup>75</sup> In fact, other studies based on standardised test results found neutral to small achievement benefits of community schooling.<sup>76</sup>

Where more convincing evidence of improvement is found, is in lowering drop-out rates from schools and in reducing risky behaviour in pupils. A study in the US found that effective interventions against truancy and absenteeism had the effect of reducing drop-out rates at community schools. Again these strategies worked particularly well with the most at risk groups; research by Fries et. al. suggests that those most at risk, those pregnant or parenting or involved in juvenile courts, were most positively impacted by attending community schools.<sup>77</sup>

Community schools are also beneficial in reducing risky behaviour amongst pupils. Pupils who attend community schools are more often at after-school clubs than other pupils and Heers et.al. suggest that this could contribute to reducing risky behaviour and giving young people meaningful activities to pursue.<sup>78</sup> In the US mental and physical health services are often incorporated within community schools and their presence correlates with improved health knowledge amongst pupils.<sup>79</sup> However, the impact on risky behaviour is inconsistent, and Heers et. al. suggest that more intense services are needed to significantly reduce risky behaviour.<sup>80</sup>

The debate about the role schools can play has tended to emphasise their physical assets and co-location of public services to support community-hub type activity. There is some evidence that involvement with the wider range of services supports is associated with improved attainment for students with learning difficulties. Currently there is little evidence of a hub-achievement link for mainstream students, however there is a positive association with community schools, strong family involvement and attainment.



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## 4. The Conditions for Success

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*"In achieving improvements in attainment, the evidence is clear that a 'school first' approach should be taken. While parental involvement and engagement are important underpinning factors in achievement, and while schools have a focal role as community development anchors, for disadvantaged areas more immediate gains can be made through in-school reforms."*

### 4.1 Overcoming the problem

#### 4.1.1 Poor outcomes for young people

Knowsley has experienced persistent underperformance in its secondary schools over an extended period. The attainment of young people on leaving compulsory education from schools in the borough lags behind the national average and other authorities with similar socio-economic indicators. In fact the most disadvantaged pupils are faring worse by comparison, with the gap widening over the past 10 years.

Despite a relatively well performing primary sector, pupils in Knowsley are beginning to under-achieve by their teenage years by which time the pattern becomes harder to reverse. Young people are leaving school ill equipped to compete in the local labour market because of low qualifications and poor skills. Consequently, their young adult lives are more likely to be scarred by the effects of unemployment and welfare dependency. Opportunities to advance to higher education, and high earning jobs, are for most young people in Knowsley even more remote.

This problem is increasingly intergenerational, with poor educational attainment passing from parents to their children. It is contributing to the cycle of deprivation in the borough and preventing Knowsley from realising its ambitions to create a prosperous and inclusive economy.

Achieving the aspirations for the City Region and the wider Northern Powerhouse will rest on places like Knowsley being able to provide the skilled workforce of the future.

#### 4.1.2 Double disadvantage

The challenge facing Knowsley is considerable. The evidence tells us that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to achieve in relation to children from more prosperous backgrounds. In addition, of all those from disadvantaged backgrounds it is White British pupils that are the least likely to attain. With a predominantly white working class population and high levels of deprivation the problem in Knowsley is two-fold and negatively reinforcing.

This is not to say that improvements cannot be made. London has had much success in raising the attainment of its disadvantaged White British pupils. But evidence points to that achievement arising largely from in-school effects. In such a context, it is important that the school can be a transformational institution, an agent of social mobility, which can provide and compensate for wider disadvantages in terms of access to extra-curricula activities and educational influences that more middle-class families might enjoy.

Schools in Knowsley should aim to develop an inclusive curriculum, which raises aspirations and, importantly, meets the needs of white working class pupils (and



their parents). This could be achieved by building on experience and celebrating the history of working class culture in the region but also takes advantage of local history, for example, the Shakespeare connection to Knowsley to make relevant what might otherwise be culturally removed.

#### 4.1.3 Low expectations by 'the system'

There is a need to aim high and provide a learning environment in which academic excellence can be achieved. However, there is a sense that for too long there have been low expectations of the potential of young people in Knowsley's schools. The emphasis on vocational education and the lack of Sixth Form provision in a secondary school environment within the borough suggests that a non-academic path is already predetermined for the whole student population. Without high quality Sixth Form provision with an ambitious, academic curriculum in the traditional subjects valued by higher education institutions, schools in the borough are signalling that academic excellence resides elsewhere.

The experience from East London in establishing the country's first free school Sixth Form College for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, could serve as a useful model for consideration. The London Academy of Excellence is selective, based on interviews and places conditional on GCSE results, and was founded in collaboration with some of the leading independent fee-paying schools in south-east England, including Eton College and the City of London School. A successful Sixth Form Academy in Knowsley could operate within and across existing schools in the borough, and partner with private schools in the region. Such a institution would act as beacon for excellence that would draw pupils from all secondary schools across the Borough, and beyond.

#### 4.1.4 Narrow horizons

A lack of diversity within the resident population provides limited access to wider experience and influences that might positively impact on the aspirations of younger people. A homogenous white working class 'mono-culture' prevails in the borough.

Too many children growing up in Knowsley have little or no contact with others from different social and ethnic backgrounds, which arguably value education more. Or with high achieving professionals, or more simply anyone within their families or wider network of friends that aspire beyond the current norms. For the most part the norms that hold across the area are not focussed on high educational attainment, or an assumption of a Russell Group university place, or the expectation of a successful career.

In the language of social capital, Knowsley provides a strong 'bonding' capital - a strong sense of internal group identity and belonging. Heads interviewed for this research pointed to very strong networks of extended families and inter-generational ties that bond and bind individuals in the borough. Such dynamics can be central to support networks but can also be restrictive for individuals within the group. The risk is of unintentionally narrow horizons, limited models of what is possible and lack of know-how to chart a course towards it.

### 4.2 Meeting the operational challenge

#### 4.2.1 Governance: influence not control

The policy and operational landscape for local education authorities is one where they have the responsibility for quality education provision, but do not hold the levers of power to directly implement reform. The academy programme has given schools autonomy over their teaching staff, curriculum, student intake and general powers of self-management. As such, it is now a context where local education authorities must use influence, engagement and support in efforts to achieve transformation of education attainment. The proposed Knowsley Education Commission is one way senior leaders in the Council can seek to influence education provision in the Borough.

Following the recent White Paper the Government has announced that it will not bring in legislation compelling schools to convert, but will instead introduce new powers which will trigger conversion

of all schools in an area if a council is underperforming or if it is no longer financially viable for it to run schools. Attainment in primary schools has been good and but there is still a risk that future underperformance could activate a conversion process which would distract schools and Borough leaders from further progress on their improvement agenda. There is little evidence pointing to a definitive positive impact of academisation per se, suggesting it might be substantial effort for little gain. Also, there is a further question about the capacity of the current academy chains, or those in the region, to rapidly take on significant numbers of additional schools.

Schools in Knowsley have shown they will take on self governing autonomy on their own terms and according to their own timeframe, they can effectively pursue conversion to Academy status (or for that matter grammar schools should new legislation allow) independently and regardless of the LEA position. The academy process should be allowed to organically spread to primaries in the Borough over time – and not be pursued in haste. This said, primary schools are already working in collaborative peer networks, which can be seen as a foundation for similar multi-academy trusts. The transition may therefore be less sharp than in other education authority areas. Academisation could also be a catalyst for renewed focus on pursuing an ambitious attainment programme, the key goal being a greater share of children attaining Level 5 at KS2.

#### 4.2.2 Change fatigue and patchy implementation

The problems with the effectiveness of schools in Knowsley has continued despite significant capital investment in new schools and the cooperation of a local education authority determined to work with the grain of government policy.

Knowsley has taken a range of actions to address the challenges in its education provision. The past decade can be described as a period of rapid and substantial change. Indeed, there is an element of change fatigue in the borough and a need, now that most secondary

schools have converted to academies, to bed down and see through those systemic changes.

Considering the raft of changes that have been implemented in Knowsley's secondary sector - with new buildings and campuses, new structures and types of schools, and new curricula - there is a sense that the improvement efforts in the borough have not been focussed, monitored or applied consistently over time. The careful implementation of improvement interventions could reap rewards for the borough's attainment.

### 4.2.3 Build on good early education provision

In recognition of the crucial developmental role for parents (and other close, frequent carers such as grandparents), consultation with senior Knowsley MBC officers in Early Help outlined how the network of children's centres is now focussing on the 0-2 years cohort. With the extension of free day nursery places from 2 years, and provision for the 2+ years well established and good quality, a gap has emerged in support for infants. A range of structured courses (~12 weeks) are offered via children's centres to support infant and toddler development (e.g. baby massage, sensory play), foster the bonding between parent/ carer and child necessary for strong, functional relationships in the future and which track the child's development against the Early Years Foundation Stage milestones to monitor and flag any developmental issues. There is, thus, a strong foundation of early years provision on which to build in the borough.

### 4.2.4 Data driven

Education is closely measured and monitored and performance reported to central government and local leaders. At the same time, the Council tracks young children participating in children's centres provision through to school. Additionally, schools will have their own performance management and tracking systems. Use of all these sources of information is critical in determining, at fine grained level, the areas of weak attainment and the children currently or at risk of poor

attainment. Local leaders and school senior management teams should ensure the data collection at Borough and individual school level monitors performance against key metrics, is used to pinpoint support for individual pupils and is used to inform an iterative programme of improvement interventions.

## 4.3 Charting the way forward

### 4.3.1 Concerted attention to in-school transformation

Given the challenges Knowsley faces directly within its schools and more widely amongst its population, education transformation is a pressing priority. In achieving improvements in attainment, the evidence is clear that a 'school first' approach should be taken. While parental involvement and engagement are important underpinning factors in achievement, and while schools have a focal role as community development anchors, for disadvantaged areas more immediate gains can be made through in-school reforms. This means that it is changes in the classroom – to teacher quality, teaching methods, an ambitious, academic curriculum and discipline – that will have the largest and most immediate impacts.

Borrowing from the KIPP approach, the elements that comprise an effective approach to delivering transformation change in a school can be summarised in the following terms:

#### Teaching

- Excellent teachers create excellent outcomes for children
- Excellent teachers are not born, they are prepared

#### Leadership

- Great leaders hire, train and support their teachers and build a dynamic academic ecosystem (school buildings, after school clubs, recreation centres etc.)

#### Academic ecosystem

- A great academic ecosystem has six key elements: inspirational talent, joyous culture, academic rigour, thoughtful data, targeted tutoring and more time in school

#### Choice

- Families and students need choice and a voice in pursuing the educational setting that best suits them.

Knowsley should aim to create such an academic ecosystem, between all phases of education in the borough that can support and deliver excellence. Many of the measures outlined in the Government's recent White Paper identify the need to support the scope of this ambition, including improving standards of teacher training and continued professional development, and the Education Commission should explore with the Government how this can be achieved.

### 4.3.2 Getting upstream: high primary school attainment

The evidence shows that attainment at GCSE is strongly linked to primary schools achieving at level 5. There has been a concern in the debate that teaching to this nationally mandated minimum has been considered the goal. Knowsley Heads interviewed for this project indicate that achieving level 4 at KS2 is an ambitious goal for some schools and some students. In response, some schools are increasing their nursery provision to get 'upstream' of school readiness and the child's foundation level learning in order to have positive impact on the ultimate KS2 results. The evidence is clear that exceeding the national minimum, to level 4b or ideally 5+, is far more likely to lead to good attainment at GCSE.

### 4.3.3 Team GB: incremental, comprehensive, concurrent

One of the key findings in what makes the difference to disadvantaged students is that all the potential interventions need to be applied consistently, to a high standard, monitored for impact and, crucially, implemented concurrently. There are useful comparisons to be drawn from the 'marginal gains' approach to improved performance implemented by the Great Britain Olympic cycling team. This was a strategy to make a 1 per cent improvement across a range of inputs resulting in cumulative gains that would end up being hugely significant. This model of development sought small incremental improvements that could be

simultaneously applied, monitored, tracked and controlled for effectiveness and impact.

In an education setting, the 'Team GB' concept would mean interventions targeted at the student, the teacher, the curriculum, the school leadership and management. All these interventions will have benefits for attainment; all must be applied at the same time and closely monitored for impact and refinement.

#### 4.3.4 Catalysing economic development

As house prices show, a good school attracts a premium in property prices within their catchment. A good school is a magnet and figures highly in the decision making criteria of parents as they consider buying into or moving to a new locale. For Knowsley Borough, a high performing school offers the potential to reinvent its image within the Liverpool City Region, as a desirable area for families, where decent homes with ample local green-space are affordable within easy commuting distance of Liverpool or Manchester. In this sense, a high performing school is a catalyst for drawing in a more affluent set of residents, which in turn creates local economic demand. The current lack of local economic dynamism can be seen, for example, in the fact that Kirby has no supermarket despite being a town of near 40,000 people. If a high performing school could attract a different profile of resident, those kinds of economic gaps have a greater chance of being resolved.

It also has the potential for ripple effects on all the schools in the borough. It is recognised that one key approach to

improving attainment for disadvantaged children is greater interactions with children of higher economic and social backgrounds. A desirable, high performing school drawing in families of higher socio-economic profile makes that kind of mixing more possible, overcoming some of the impacts of concentrated disadvantage. There is also an element of establishing a 'new normal'. Part of the London effect is the dynamic relationship between schools, each learning from each other's success and seeking improvement through a process of competition. Taken together this process establishes an environment where good performance and attainment is the assumed norm.

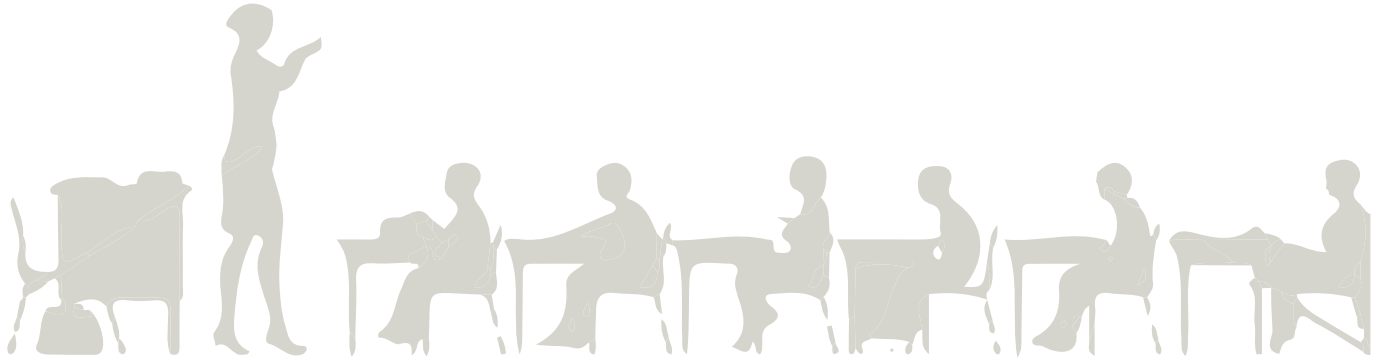
#### 4.3.5 Need for innovation

The prospect of new legislation that allows for a grammar school to emerge in Knowsley could provide the kind of economic 'magnet' which would help reverse the current flow of pupils out of the borough and attract new families in. Grammar schools are popular with parents and an existing school in the borough may choose to respond to this opportunity. The challenge would be to establish mechanisms for primary schools to prepare their most able pupils for a 'tutor-proof' entrance exam and to raise standards for all children in the process so that the non-selective schools are not left behind and overall performance is improved.

The continuing attainment challenges across England and in areas like Knowsley, particularly amongst disadvantaged white British pupils, show that the education system is in desperate need of innovation and radical advances. A host of largely structural reforms have been rolled out by successive

governments in the last two decades. Yet as the London experiment shows, none of them have been exclusively or conclusively responsible for education transformation. There are concerns in Knowsley about the implications of academisation; that further structural change will be an unwelcome distraction from getting on with the necessary in-school improvements. Nonetheless, Knowsley, has a track record of actively supporting reform and so is well placed to respond to schools in the borough that want to pursue this agenda.

Schools must be allowed to innovate and can best be supported in this endeavour through a new accord with Government. A less adversarial and more collaborative approach is needed with the Department of Education; one that can deliver the kind of transformation in educational improvement that is required. Knowsley should seek to become an 'achieving excellence area' as outlined in the White Paper. Further, the borough should pursue a 'Knowsley Challenge' modelled on the London experience that brings together resource, school leadership, and a concerted local commitment overseen by the Knowsley Education Commission. These interventions would represent a positive way forward for the Department and Knowsley to work together.



## 5. Recommendations

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### *5.1 To Government:*

**Recommendation 1:** In recognition of Knowsley MBC's previous active implementation of government education programmes, and the Council's current commitment to achieving a step change in education attainment in the Borough, the Secretary of State for Education should grant operational flexibilities to the Borough in implementing new education policies and consider Knowsley becoming an 'achieving excellence area'.

**Recommendation 2:** The Secretary of State and the Department for Education should demonstrate their acknowledgement of Knowsley's commitment to education transformation by meeting with Council and school leaders to learn more about the borough's transformation programme.

**Recommendation 3:** The Secretary of State should use her involvement in the Local Growth Fund process to advocate to DCLG colleagues that a 'Knowsley Challenge' pilot be resourced via that fund, recognising the importance of excellence in education to the Northern Powerhouse economic growth agenda.

**Recommendation 4:** Government should in addition to the conditions outlined in the Green Paper ensure that any future grammar schools target the most disadvantaged areas, where there are no existing local schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. They should be in

places that offer the best chance of future economic growth, addressing both opportunities and need. Importantly, any system of selection should identify – based on means - and meet a quota of children from poorer backgrounds, before offering places more widely.

### *5.2 To the Local Education Authority:*

**Recommendation 5:** The Borough should include in the 'Knowsley Challenge' provision to identify and track high

achievers as they move through the education system (including cross Borough) and develop interventions to maintain their high levels of performance and prevent them becoming 'missing talent'.

**Recommendation 6:** The Borough should convene a Schools Senior Management Learning Network for secondary school Heads and senior management teams, enabling peer to peer support and partnership working.

**Recommendation 7:** The Borough should use its role providing wider community services (e.g. childcare) and its analytics capability to ensure children are tracked from KS1 to KS5 to enable performance to be monitored and for transitions to be handled well.

**Recommendation 8:** In light of the strong links between early years education and school readiness, the Borough should consider including early years as part of the mainstream education offer and examine how to involve schools in commissioning and providing early years provision.

**Recommendation 9:** In recognition of the lack of school based sixth form provision in the Borough, the LEA should consider seeking sponsors to establish a sixth form Academy of Excellence. In the mould of the London Academy of Excellence, it would draw pupils from all secondary schools across the Borough, and beyond.

It could be selective and have the backing of, and active partnerships with, regional public schools.

**Recommendation 10:** The LEA should investigate how KMBC/ the Archdiocese could establish their own primary school academies chain to ensure continuing high quality education provision feeds into the established secondary academies.

### 5.3 To the Knowsley Education Commission:

**Recommendation 11:** Membership and terms of reference for the Commission should be determined as a priority and the Commission should commence work as soon as practicable.

**Recommendation 12:** A 'Knowsley Challenge', in the model of the London Challenge, should be developed under the auspices of the Commission.

**Recommendation 13:** The Knowsley Education Commission should develop a programme of action research, including:

- Taking stock of current improvement and attainment strategies already in operation in individual schools now that they are bedded in as academies
- Considering whether there are remaining design issues as a legacy of BSF that continue to affect teaching and learning and how they could best be rectified to

provide for an academic curriculum, and sharing that learning with colleagues across the LCR, and

- Engaging with parents, service providers and the wider community.

**Recommendation 14:** The Commission should appoint a 'Schools Transformation Tsar': a high profile individual, with professional experience and recognised authority on schools transformation, to act as a mentor and troubleshooter for KMBC schools senior management teams.

**Recommendation 15:** The Commission should seek to establish a North West Improvement Board with counterparts in the Liverpool City Region which will undertake research to design an improvement cycle and take responsibility for monitoring it and reporting to political leaders.

**Recommendation 16:** The Commission should develop a dedicated campaign within the borough and city region and, in particular, to Government, to promote schools' efforts on transformation, their improvements and journey to date. The Commission would act as a champion for the Boroughs education professionals as they work towards improved attainment.

**Recommendation 17:** The Commission should convene a work strand exploring the extent to which schools are operating as 'community schools' following the American model where a range of public services such as health, social services, training and employment, are provided on campus and where partnerships are developed with additional community based activities and enrichment opportunities. The Commission should explore the barriers to doing so and recommendations for ensuring it happens on the ground.

**Recommendation 18:** The Commission should investigate the use and effectiveness of the Pupil Premium with a view to considering requesting flexibilities in its use from the Secretary of State.

### 5.4 To Schools:

**Recommendation 19:** All schools should adopt a 'Team GB' approach - identifying the inputs within their control, developing strategies and interventions, using data and tracking to pinpoint individual students, establishing metrics to measure progress, monitor and evaluate effectiveness, identify 'what works' and share good practice with colleagues across the Borough.

**Recommendation 20:** All schools concentrate on the core purpose of delivering academic excellence by concentrating on high quality teaching and attainment in the 'basics'.

**Recommendation 21:** Primary schools should aim to achieve the aspirational target of level 5+ (or new measurement equivalent) at KS2, as an evidence-backed route to laying the foundations for good GCSE performance at secondary school.

**Recommendation 22:** All schools should establish where they have not already done so, robust performance management frameworks and regularly monitor teaching staff to identify areas of talent and areas for support.

**Recommendation 23:** Secondary schools should institute an extended school model in the mode of KIPP schools – in particular longer school days and shorter holidays and include extracurricular activities to support enrichment.

**Recommendations 24:** As schools begin to experience increasing demand (e.g. Lord Derby), schools should widen their geographical catchment and consider 'fair banding' to test pupils as part of the admissions process to attract a wider student population across the ability ranges.

**Recommendation 25:** All schools should implement, where they do not already have one, an active programme of family learning, particularly focussing on literacy.

**Recommendation 26:** All schools should look to establish substantial and practical relationships with public (i.e. private) schools in the region or further afield, with a view to:

- Accessing subject teaching excellence
- Accessing teaching support in specialist fields not provided for or not well supported in the Borough (e.g. higher mathematics, foreign languages)
- Accessing facilities not available in the Borough (swimming pools, drama studios etc)
- Broadening students horizons through inter-school events and exchanges, and
- Tapping into the public school parents' network base to support internships.

**Recommendation 27:** Schools aim to link curricula to local history to reinforce local connections that can support engagement and learning, for example, the Shakespeare connection to Knowsley.

**Recommendation 28:** Schools should consider introducing a teaching emeritus programme, or teacher- in-residence scheme, to make expert teaching insight available to staff as part of their continuing

professional development and as part of an incentives package to recruit high quality teaching staff.

### *5.5 To the Liverpool City Region:*

**Recommendation 29:** Reflecting the Education Manifesto 2015, the LCR should scope a 'Northern Premium' to attract quality teachers to the region through incentives such as paying off teachers' student debts, boosted wages, subsidised housing or additional continuing professional development and fast track development.

**Recommendation 30:** The LCR should bid into the new round of local growth funding with a focus on the role of education in addressing the local skills deficit. This reflects the recent announcement that the Education Secretary will have a role in determining how monies will be allocated to areas.

**Recommendation 31:** The LCR should scope an internship programme, to be piloted in Knowsley as the Knowsley Bursary for Excellence. This would make living

allowances available to final year (sixth form) students, allowing them to take up high profile internships in other cities.

**Recommendation 32:** The LCR should review and assess the quality and scale of careers provision across the region with a view to substantially boosting its calibre and availability.

**Recommendation 33:** The LCR should review the devolution deal asks to assess the role of education in contributing to economic performance.

*Society*

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The education system has been repeatedly reformed by a succession of governments and yet many schools across the country continue to under perform, blighting the life chances of too many young people. Poor educational attainment is particularly problematic in the North and it has been identified as a drag on the potential for economic growth, putting at risk ambitions to revive England's northern cities and create a 'Northern Powerhouse'.

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council has commissioned this review of education performance to help catalyse a step change in the quality of education provision in the Borough and kick start a process of improvement to be overseen by the Knowsley Education Commission.

Achieving Educational Excellence identifies the key features of successful schools - in supporting disadvantaged pupils to achieve - and makes a wide range of recommendations to Local and Central Government, the Education Commission, Schools and City Region partners to drive forward improvements. At the same time, there is a broader opportunity: in creating an approach that supports their pupils, families and schools, Knowsley can point the way for many areas with similar challenges and offer a path towards long term educational attainment.



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