

Summary of the Buckinghamshire Plan for National Challenge January 2009

Introduction

A number of Buckinghamshire schools were identified by the Government in the National Challenge initiative to ensure that all schools have at least 30% of students achieving 5 'good' GCSEs including Maths and English by 2011.

The initial criteria for inclusion on the list of National Challenge Schools was that less than 30% of Year 11 students achieved 5+ A* - C Grades including Maths and English in 2007.

In June 2008, there were 8 schools on this list in Buckinghamshire and this represents just under 25% of the 34 secondary schools. Buckinghamshire is a high achieving and high attaining Local Authority and the criteria used for National Challenge presents a number of challenges for schools operating in a selective system. The criteria make no allowance for the prior attainment and the progress made by pupils.

The Position in the Current Academic Year

The 2008 GCSE results have been published and the Local Authority recognises the good overall progress achieved by Buckinghamshire schools at Key Stage 4 (KS4).

Several schools that were in the original group based on 2007 results, achieved results in 2008 that took them above the 30% threshold. Some achieved results in the 30-35% range and were considered as remaining vulnerable. One school is no longer involved in the initiative, but another school has replaced that school. There are therefore currently eight Buckinghamshire schools involved in the National Challenge initiative, but only 4 schools where the 2008 results are below the 30% floor target threshold.

The schools currently involved are:

The Buckingham School, Burnham Upper School, Chesham Park Community College, Cressex Community School, The Grange School, Highcrest Community School, Mandeville Upper School and Quarrendon School

The DCSF indicated that more detailed plans would need to be drafted in September 2008 for schools remaining on the list and a Raising Attainment Plan (RAP) would be completed after detailed work with each school. These have been completed and the funding implications evaluated.

There is a national budget of £400 million to support the National Challenge Schools of which over 50% is expected to be spent on structural changes. e.g. The Government is keen to see more Academies, School Federations or National Challenge Trust Schools set up.

Some £100m nationally will be made available to support schools and the Local Authority has worked with the Buckinghamshire schools to look at potential further solutions such as learning mentors and Advanced Skills Teachers to support progress.

The level of additional funding that will be allocated depends on the specific plans for each school and the time period that is expected to be needed to ensure that the GCSE results are securely above the floor target.

Summary of Support

The principle behind the National Challenge is that schools must lead the changes that are needed, with the support of a National Challenge Adviser (NCA), plus support from the Local Authority and the government. The intention is to use resources to build a 'team around the school' with the Headteacher and NCA at the heart of this team.

The eight schools in the National Challenge in Buckinghamshire are receiving a total of 116 days of NCA support with the range being between 6 days and 20 days. The majority of schools are receiving 15 days support.

The total budget made available to Buckinghamshire from National Challenge funding to support further improvements within the eight schools during the current Academic Year is £757,000. The range for each individual school is from £69,000 to £152,000. This includes the funding to provide the NCA support.

The variations in NCA support and funding allocations reflect the agreed priorities within individual school RAPs and the complexity of the issues that need to be addressed.

The type of issues being addressed include strategies to support:

- Improving attendance during KS4
- Tracking student progress and supporting target setting
- Improving achievement and attainment in Core Subjects (English and Mathematics)
- Supporting students in achieving good GCSE results in other subjects

The approaches used vary considerably and can include supporting additional capacity within the school's Senior Leadership Team; supporting leadership and support for Core Subjects; improving teaching and learning in Core Subjects and the appointment of Advanced Skills Teachers or Learning Mentors to support improvements.

Not all of these issues apply in every school and the RAP serves to identify what is most appropriate to support each school and ensure that the resources available reflect the priorities.

In addition to the additional external resources allocated to each school, the Local Authority is supporting each school with targeted support from subject

adviser and consultants from the School Improvement Service plus support from members of the wider Children's Services Team as appropriate.

Structural Changes

Local Authorities have been required to consider both short-term and longer-term plans for schools' futures.

In Buckinghamshire, plans are already in place for Quarrendon School to become an Academy in September 2009. Plans are also in place to see a major rebuild of the Cressex Community School into new purpose-build premises.

Note

- These notes are accurate as at January 2009 and are published to coincide with the national publication of the 2008 GCSE and Post –16 Examination Results on Thursday 15th January 2009.
- This document serves to summarise the initiative across the County. Students and their parents attending a school engaged in the National Challenge should address any questions relating to specific implications for their school to the leadership of their school.