



Northumberland
County Council

Annual Report for
Education & Skills Service

2020-21



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The annual report for the Education & Skills Service is designed to inform and review education performance across Northumberland. Analysing the impact of work completed across the year underpins the review of key areas for improvement in collective education and skills priorities, informing how we revisit and shape future progression.

The Academic year 2020-21 was another year of disruption, restrictions and remote learning amid challenging circumstances within which the profession maintained as stable a position for our children as they possibly could. In short, another extraordinary year in which education and skills have been hugely affected by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

This year has been very different to the previous, and in many ways tougher for the schools and skills professionals as well as children, young people, residents and their families. However, what remained clear is the importance of our work for children, young people and residents - whatever the circumstances, we continued to respond and support at every opportunity.

An unwavering and strengthened approach to keep the child or young person safe and at the heart of decisions, remained core to dynamic work practices. The development of a health and wellbeing forum for the workforce was identified and well developed ahead of any national announcements.

This is the second annual report for Northumberland which has been produced in a digital format. It contains numerous links to detailed reports for further reading and review. This report highlights key facets to showcase to everyone the work undertaken that was built upon previous learning, and should be acknowledged and celebrated as incisive, purposeful, decisive and resilient.

The sector continues to recover, respond and reflect, particularly where a return to more usual routine education remains challenging i.e. Adult Community Learning and Apprenticeships. We highlight areas that continue to be a focus for even greater change to improve the life chances for our children and young people as well as residents in Northumberland.

The extent of the recovery required to identify and close gaps is one of the greatest challenges we face. It is difficult to begin to calculate the precise recovery required in such circumstances. Ofsted continues to inspect but do not examine outcomes and data in the same way and in particular examine the support infrastructures for pupils.

Our work supporting all aspects and phases of education remains a key priority with specific areas of focus to narrow and close gaps in educational attainment, transition, progress and outcomes. All the while being mindful of ensuring our approaches and systems are delivering social mobility and building our approach to inclusive growth, supporting future life chances for all.



The resilient and determined approach demonstrated by early years settings, schools, skills and education support services to recognise the needs of our children and their families and carers was outstanding and commendable.

Cath McEvoy-Carr
Executive Director of
Adult Social Care and
Children's Services

Audrey Kingham
Director of
Education and Skills

Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson
Lead Member
Children's Services

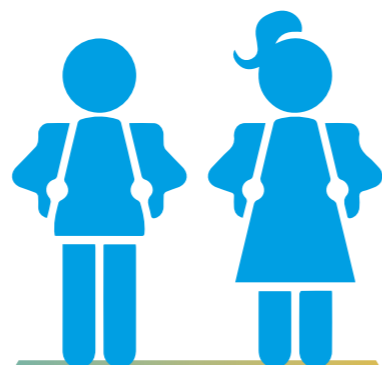


Foundation Stage and Primary



The quality of early years provision in Northumberland is excellent.

98% of early years providers were rated Good or Outstanding at Summer 2021.



The take up of 2-year-old provision is outstanding

87% of all eligible 2 year olds took up their statutory entitlement to early education in the summer term 2021.

This was a 9% increase on the spring term 2021, and was better than the National Average of 62%, placing Northumberland 9th highest in the country

Impact across 2020-21

In the Summer term 2021, **98.4%** of parents got their first choice of primary school compared with **90.2%** nationally.



Primary education in Northumberland is good

91% of primary schools in Northumberland were **judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding or Good in Summer 2021**. This compares to the National Average of **88%**



Inclusion in primary education in Northumberland

Encouragingly, there were **no children permanently excluded from a Northumberland primary school in the 2020-21 academic year**; this compares to 3 in the previous year



Secondary

The quality of secondary education in Northumberland is improving

67% of secondary schools in Northumberland were judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding or Good in Summer 2021. This was below the National Average of 76% and needs to improve further



Inclusion in secondary education in Northumberland is improving

There were fewer secondary age school children permanently excluded in the 2020-21 school year, **reducing to 44 from 47 the previous year**

At Key Stage 4 schools have performed broadly as expected with no outliers in performance

97.6% of parents got their first choice of secondary school compared with 82.2% nationally

Headline results have been received from all 16 Northumberland secondary/high schools. **There were 3058 pupils in the cohort**

The proportion of pupils entering EBacc subjects continues to rise slowly over time ranging between **0% and 65% with an average of 20%**. In 2019 the national figure stood at 40%

The **Attainment 8 figure of 49.7** continues the trend of **improvement from 2017**

The gap between the proportions of pupils achieving **4+ English & maths and 5+ English & maths remains at about 25%**. In 2019 the national figure stood at 22%

At Key Stage 5 the greater majority of A level pupils in Northumberland have achieved the grades they required to move onto their chosen next step in education, employment or training

Schools have performed broadly as expected with no outliers in performance

Headline results have been received from all 15 Northumberland secondary/high schools. (The Blyth Academy is not running a sixth form at present). **There were 1164 pupils in the cohort**

The average A level points score of 39 equates to a grade B. The National Average in 2019 was 34

The average Applied General points score of 36 equates to a Distinction. The National Average in 2019 was 29

90% of pupils in Northumberland achieved the grades that met their entry into their first choice university - around 400 of those pupils are attending Russell Group universities

School improvement

More than
100

newly qualified teachers
(NQTs) were supported in Northumberland

400

School Improvement Partner visits took place across the academic year providing support and challenge to schools including **31 Ofsted inspection and monitoring visits**

More than
1000

attendees at early years development and training sessions

and routine topical remote learning opportunities were provided to support all school staff.

Alternative provision

The local authority commissions places in alternative provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from school. Provision at alternative providers or new schools has to be arranged within six days of an exclusion taking place.

Details on alternative provision in Northumberland are available in the alternative provider catalogue here.

In the 2020-21 academic year, sixth-day provision was arranged within timescale for **98% of cases, which is a significant improvement on previous years where the figure has been around 75%**

The education achievement of Northumberland's care-experienced children improves when they enter care, and the highest achievers are those who have been in care the longest.

The strong track record of successfully raising the aspirations of our care-experienced children continues. For the third consecutive year achievement at GCSE continued to improve and has almost tripled since 2019, meaning that more pupils are following level 3 courses at age 16.

The right support is being provided to develop meaningful pathways for school leavers into education, training and employment.

Inclusive partnership working with schools and alternative providers continues to be strong.

Relationships with families that electively home educate their children are good. An increasing number of annual reviews have been submitted (only one progressing to a School Attendance Order), providing re-assurance that more children are receiving a suitable education at home.

The multi-agency strategy to safeguard children that are electively home educated is working. The number of children being educated at home has increased steadily to 294 at July 2021. This is in line with regional and national rises in Elective Home Education.



80% of our looked after pupils who achieved 5+ GCSEs with grades 9 – 5 had been in care for at least 3 years.



Being in care has a **positive impact on education achievement.**



Achievements at all post-16 stages are at record levels in Northumberland, with **80% of school leavers progressing into further education and more care leavers now studying for degrees.**

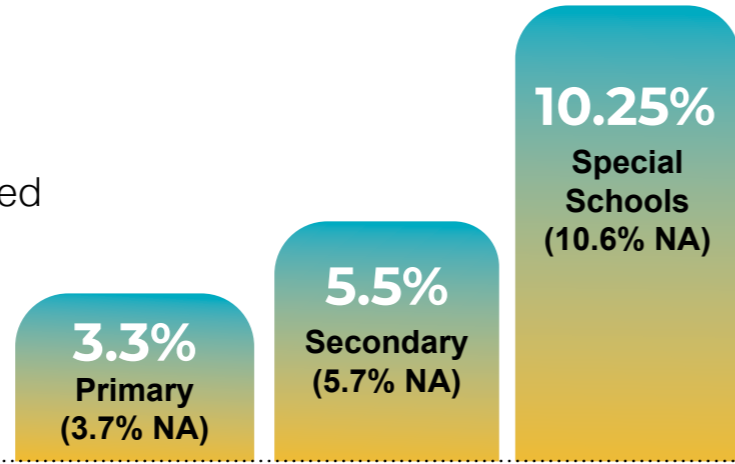


For the **13th consecutive year** there has been no permanent exclusion of a care-experienced child and **the PEP completion rate is 98%.**



Overall attendance rates have remained steadily above the National Average.

Absence rates are below National Averages at:



The impact of the pandemic has been mitigated by targeting schools where there are high levels of persistent absence, children returning to school after a period of elective home education, and pupils who have been out of school for long periods of time.

The safeguarding process for preventing and finding children missing education is highly effective



Five children were reported as missing and were found, and over **1000 children were identified as at risk of going missing and tracked throughout the year.**

School engagement with the Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership (NSSP) is good.

The implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model, a role in the safe return of children to school and implementing learning from case reviews has emerged from the Schools Engagement Group.



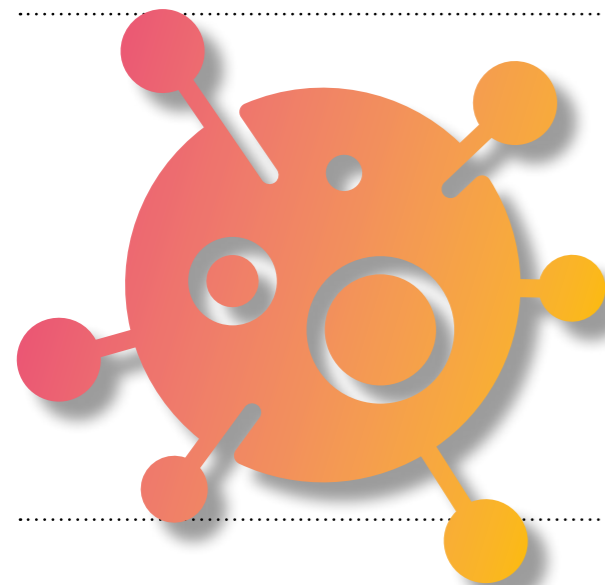
Northumberland was revisited in the Summer Term by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and was **one of the 2 Local Authorities out of 8 that term, who passed all areas for improvement.**

Throughout 2020- 2021, our specialist teaching and educational psychology services have provided support and advice for children and young people with special educational needs in **98%** of our schools.



The HINT teams worked most extensively in Blyth, then Berwick followed by Alnwick, Bedlington and Ashington, though Northumberland Inclusive Education Services work has increased in all partnerships. **Through 2020/21, the highest referrals came into Speech, Language & Communication Needs, Autism Support and Emotional Wellbeing & Behaviour.**

Throughout 2020-21 the Educational Psychology service continued to provide ongoing support and advice to many of the educational settings in Northumberland and children and families, along with specialist advice for all pupils undergoing Education, Health and Care needs assessments. The Service also continued to provide support into our Children's Homes, and the Mental Health Support Teams in Hexham, Blyth, Ashington and Bedlington. **They provided over 100 hours of support to children, young people, families and schools/ settings related to a small number of critical incidents that took place across the year.**



The return to school following the pandemic brought challenges across the system, and although exclusions for young people with SEN had fallen significantly over the preceding three years, 2020-21 saw a slight rise. Work is ongoing to ensure that support is provided by the local authority to continue the downward trend. **For the second year running, however, there were no permanent exclusions for students with EHCPs.**

NIES delivered training designed by the DfE to support the return to school, 'Wellbeing for Education Return' and this was well attended by schools and settings.

This has helped to equip schools with the knowledge and understanding they required to support the additional wellbeing needs of pupils and staff. As a result there has been good use of Kooth and Qwell, online platforms available to the children and young people of Northumberland and staff based in schools.

Referrals to the Autism Support and Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour Teams rose sharply in the Summer term and we have expanded the teams in order to meet demand. Children and young people referred to the time limited pop up hub in Autumn 2020 continued to be followed up in the Spring term to ensure that appropriate support was provided to maintain their attendance at school.



Given the challenges to ensure learners remained on programme, engaged and making good progress throughout the pandemic this achievement rate is reassuring. English and maths programmes this year were impacted particularly by retention (i.e., student leavers).

Programmes commenced across the year and when tracking the learners, it can be seen that leavers coincide with increased school restrictions and lockdown where parents and carers adjusted their focus to home learning.

There were 1027 enrolments onto programmes across eight campuses in 2020-21 for adult learners and 38 enrolments for young people aged 16-18 with the largest majority (96.3%) of enrolments being adult learning. It is important to note that there is no publication of performance rates nationally and these cannot be compared to any previous year's performance.

Apprenticeship recruitment in line with classroom-based learning also decreased significantly. Apprenticeship performance rates overall have reduced with some leaving their roles, many owing to Covid-related issues. The 19-24 age group (the largest cohort) however performed well above their peer Apprentices. The introduction of a new Apprenticeship manager has focused the work of the model of delivery to help more Apprentices successfully complete and achieve but more importantly to focus on a pastoral element of support in the workplace. Positive learner feedback about blended delivery was received along with the appropriate level of challenge and support which has resulted in minimal delays with end point assessment (EPA).



2020-21 was another year of disruption and change and a very untypical academic year for education, skills and training. **The Learning and Skills service self-assessment grades the service as GOOD, in terms of Ofsted gradings for 2020-21.**



The achievement rate excluding English and mathematics is **93%**. **Achievement rates for learners with an EHCP is outstanding at 100%** (learning continued on site throughout lockdown/restrictions).



Adult Learning for those aged over 19 years forms the largest majority of the service and **remains as a GOOD performance with an achievement rate of 84%, just below the National Average.**



There was a good higher-level achievement at EPA for apprentices, for example, of the Apprentices working towards IC Qualifications EPA, **their results for 2020-21 were more than good with 84% who completed their EPA achieving a higher-level result.**

(including Careers Guidance and Employability Skills & Services)



Internal progression is Good for learners, more than 94% progress and complete another programme after their first engagement but still not enough learners secure an Apprenticeship. As an example, of the **127 adult learners undertaking Health and Care qualifications, 97 progressed into employment.**

Learner’s attitudes to their education are positive and have been shown to have improved over time. Behaviour and attitudes of learners is good, with learners demonstrating effective behaviours for learning supporting what we know to be the expectations of employers.



Learners receive good links to industry throughout all curriculum areas, leading to the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours required to progress into high-quality destinations. The links are provided by staff and with business engagement being strengthened this year but with a recognition that even more engagement will benefit more of the study programme development.

Careers advisers work with a range of external agencies to effectively source provision from a range of providers. The Careers Guidance team performs the Council’s statutory duties to encourage, enable and assist young people over statutory school age but under 19 (or 25 with an EHCP) to participate in education and training. The team is also responsible for the statutory duty to track, record, report and support Northumberland residents in this cohort in relation to their post 16 education and training.



Learners excel in an environment in which they feel safe because staff and learners do not accept bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Attendance remained strong across all curriculum areas whilst engagement posed some challenges during lockdown. Engagement was closely monitored throughout lockdown and **all campuses were well managed to be COVID-19 safe learning environments.**

At July 2021 **NEET (including unknown) was 4.9% in Northumberland compared to the all-England figure of 5.3%.**



The Employability and Skills Service has continued to work throughout the pandemic restrictions and challenges and the service has grown in response to resident’s needs. **We have increased our offer of employment-focussed programmes to respond directly to the expected high rise in unemployment.**

The team delivered 4 employment programmes – The DWP JETS Programme (job entry targeted support), DWP Restart Scheme and DWP Building Better Opportunities and the North of Tyne Combined Authority funded Triage programme, which commenced in June 2020 and ceased in October 2021.



The DWP Jets (Job entry targeted support) Programme continued, delivered with Reed in Partnership, as a digital employment support programme to offer support throughout the pandemic remotely. Referrals are from Job Centres across Northumberland and participants are residents who are newly-unemployed and have been impacted by the downturn in the labour market.

Support is primarily digital and 550 residents have started on the programme and 250 have moved into employment.

Due to its success, the programme will continue until March 2023 to help residents who prefer digital engagement.



The Service continues to be well positioned to respond particularly to North of Tyne Inclusive Growth projects where the prime aims are to support residents into gaps, reduce inequality and disadvantage gaps and to support progression into employment as well as in work progression through training.

Working in tandem with the skills service provides a seamless referral point from engagement and initial training into more structured training supporting employment. To improve the progression from the non-North of Tyne funded programmes all of the residents who accessed the COVID-19 triage programme and DWP Employment programmes will be supported by the Skills Service.



The £48m Ponteland joint schools and leisure centre were completed this year.

They are now home to a 420-place primary school, 1,600-place high school, library and leisure centre with 25m pool, learner pool, aqua play, gym, café, clip 'n' climb, soft play, spa, bar and 3G and grass sports pitches. The development offers all that was asked of it by its users, whilst also providing a lifelong legacy for the community, allowing residents of all ages and abilities to use the facilities.



Despite COVID-19 restrictions for leisure services, Active Northumberland has seen a 45% increase in membership, with exercise and swimming classes fully booked each week upon opening. The scheme has also generated over £40.6m worth of social value in the local area and has had an enormous economic effect for the county of Northumberland.



Northumberland is the top-ranked authority in the Country for offering parents of children entering reception in September 2021 their first choice of primary/first school.



Since December 2020 over 47,000 free school meal vouchers have been issued at a value of over £2.1m to support children and young people entitled to free school meals to fund food and uniform costs over each school holiday period. Northumberland has had one of the highest take up rates for the scheme in the country with 95% of parents redeeming the vouchers provided for them.



The £37m Hexham Middle and Queen Elizabeth High schools also welcomed their students, opening the doors to their newly co-located buildings in September 2021.

The 18-month construction programme saw the completion of brand-new modern teaching blocks, specialised spaces, contemporary sporting facilities as well as the refurbishment of a Grade II listed building for use predominantly by the students but also the local community of Hexham to great acclaim and universally positive feedback. **In total the council has invested circa £40m during the 2020/21 academic year in improving the school estate.**



Permanent Exclusions are down by 12% and this is the third year we have seen a decline. 98% of permanently excluded learners accessed provision within 6 days; a further **69 exclusions have been prevented by offering schools support, advice and guidance** re: inclusion including the brokering of managed moves and alternative provision placements.



A total of £860,236 exceptional payments were made to 81 Schools to support those who had additional exceptional costs arising due to the coronavirus. This was over and above the provisions set up by the Department for Education via their COVID-19 workforce fund.



The second iteration of the School Organisation Plan for Northumberland has now been published and covers the period 2021-2024, it sets out how the council will fulfil its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for all children and young people resident within the county.

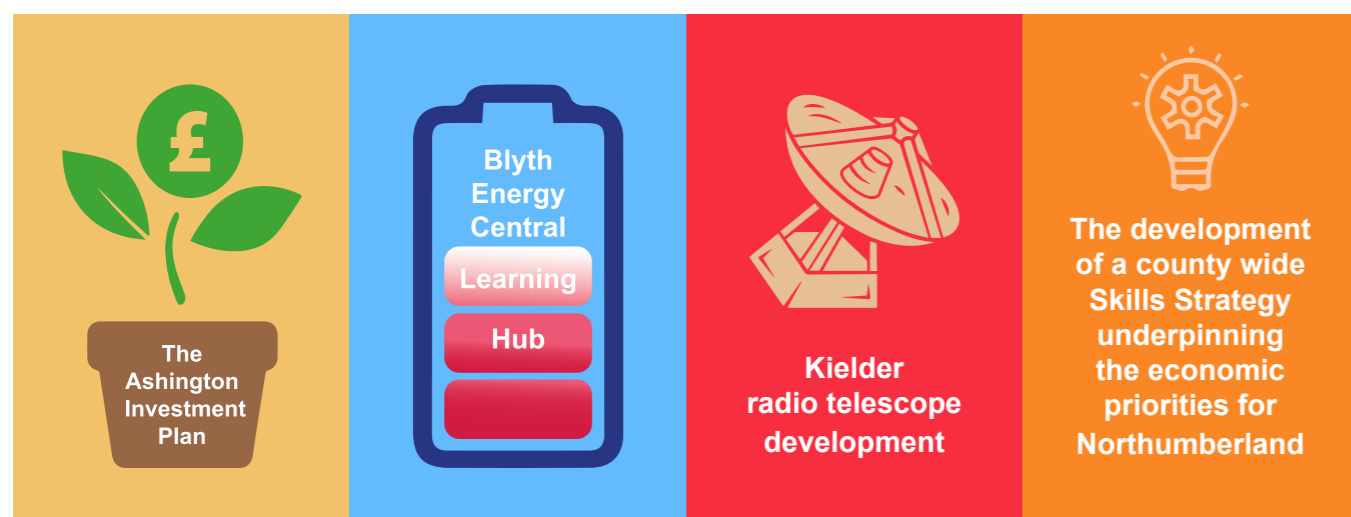
Education Development

Northumberland County Council has made significant progress towards opening the first of its technical training facilities. Over £1m funding is ringfenced in the medium-term financial plan to implement the Welding & Fabrication Training Centre at Port of Blyth, and as of October 2021 works tendering and work to agree lease on the nominated building are in progress.

Collaborating to deliver maximum value for Northumberland from the inward investment of the battery manufacturing Gigaplant located in Cambois is of paramount importance. A three-part strategy to deliver maximum impact in the following areas has been agreed between Northumberland County Council and BritishVolt as part of the terms of the Section 106 agreement:



Northumberland County Council's Education and Skills directorate has worked very closely with Regeneration colleagues to set out a number of education and skills-related projects to support a wide range of aspirations across the county. These include:



Northumberland County Council supported Health Education England in the launch of work-based supported internships for young people with Educational Health Care Plans, these programmes being delivered within Northumbria Health Care Trust settings. Support to grow the provision continues, enhancing the impacts for young people with talent but facing challenges in accessing opportunity to enter valuable and sustainable career paths.

Global Bridge digital platform has been connected with 12 of the 16 secondary schools in Northumberland in 2020-21 and supported for a two year period. The direct linking of industry working with education on a global digital platform supports access to apprenticeships, work experience and in the world in which we now live and work, a digital profile for our young people to be able to showcase their achievements to potential employers. Northumberland is the leading Local Authority across England spearheading this work.

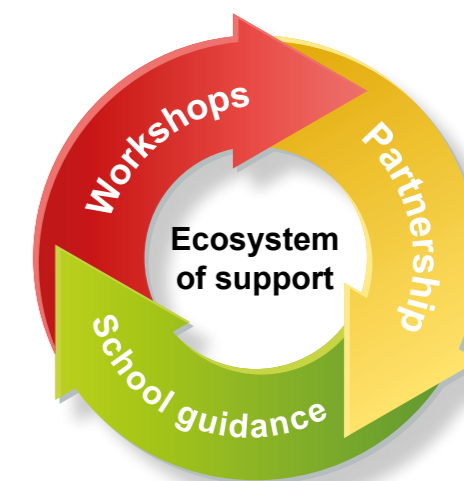
Supporting infrastructure teams for Education & Skills

The Data Unit & Performance team routinely configures available data to track and review performance without the comparability of national data. The provision of weekly reports on which learners have an allocated social worker continued during the periods of lockdown and when restrictions lifted so that schools' knowledge of their vulnerable learners was enhanced.

Public Health has become an extension of the Education and Skills team throughout the global pandemic. One of their strands of work 'Education Outbreak Control' is chaired by one of the education senior staff and has been available almost 7 days per week since March 2020 supporting early years settings, schools, and skills providers. The work, research, focus and attention to narrow down root causes and provide solutions has been relentless and valued by everyone involved.

Relationships with trade unions throughout a very challenging period have been supported by Schools HR very well. Dedicated support for schools, workshops for staff, briefing and routine updates as well as supporting schools via head teacher working groups, has contributed well to the workforce relationships amid the challenging and rapidly changing guidance and expectations received under which the schools system has worked.

Health & Safety support and guidance for schools has continued to be of a very high standard with schools recognising the standard of advice and documentation provided as exceptionally high. Briefings, workshops, partnership and individual school guidance has been provided routinely to support the ecosystem and ensure COVID-19 safe environments.



The Future

Academic Year 2020-21 has been a year of so many changes and challenges to navigate for children, young people, schools and skills providers. The system has not yet begun to quantify the 'levelling up' to return the sector to a stable baseline in 2019. There is much happening and to do to agree the baseline for future planning.

The position for terminal examinations in 2021 is not yet agreed and with two years of disrupted education routine, there will be continuous challenges for a while to come. The role of the Local Authority team is to support and underpin the route to a steady baseline and support ambition, education and success for every child, young person and resident in Northumberland. The identified focus for priorities underpins this approach.

The outcomes for our children and young people cannot be measured against performance in previous years due to the nature of the assessed process in 2021 (different to 2020). We are able to review collectively the performance across the county and provide assurance that there are no performances that are significantly differing to regional or national performance figures available.

The most important element is that our young people were prepared and supported with the grades they needed to be able to progress to their destination of choice whether that is sixth form, post 16 study, University or into employment. The average grade performances continued to rise at A level and Attainment 8 figures continue to improve. A focus for improvement at Progress 8 is required.

For Adult Learners, the return to a classroom has been much more challenging. As parents or grandparents caring for children to support family incomes, their engagement in learning has reduced. Enrolments have reduced this year. The investment in digital equipment to support this has helped but the residents do not have the time to spend long periods on line learning and value much more face to face classroom engagement. Continued engagement has been good but a confident return to learning in the classroom will be a focus.

The extent of the recovery required to identify and close gaps is one of the greatest challenges we face. It is difficult to begin to calculate the precise recovery required in such circumstances. The work of School Improvement with schools across Northumberland will continue to target areas specific in each school and will work with Headteachers, all staff in school and governors to achieve this and raise the levels of attainment and progress at each key stage even further.

The work to promote and engage with stakeholders so they are informed and own the identified priorities forms a key cornerstone of the work of the Local Authority team. Everyone talks about the impact of the global pandemic as unprecedented. In Northumberland that recognition was revised a year ago with clearly focused priorities shaping the work undertaken and we are now beginning to see some of the focused work beginning to make a difference and will continue to be dynamic and evolve to meet changing needs of our education eco system. Our recovery and steadfast approach is non-negotiable and has every child, family and resident at the heart of the approach.

The impact of the work undertaken by the whole education system across Northumberland is documented in this report. At a headline level performance in 2020-21 continues to improve for our children, attendance is improving and exclusions are reducing. Our performance against peer authorities in aspects such as admissions and first choice school places remains in the upper decile nationally.

Our approach to meet more children's needs much closer to home is, as we see the rising demand for our Inclusive Education Services, an accelerant for our immediate actions and work. Improving outcomes for some of our most disadvantaged residents and ensuring our work at every level is joined with relevant services and partners to ensure we are targeting the right and best outcomes is the core of our strategy to achieve best value at pace.

There is much for the sector to celebrate across Northumberland, the sterling work and professional standards demonstrated in challenging environments showcases the resilience and hard work and commitment for our children, young people and residents' futures.



DISCLAIMER

The information provided in this publication is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate at the time of production. Data sources are available upon request.

OTHER FORMATS

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USEFUL LINKS

[Children & Young People's Plan](#)

[Northumberland Skills Annual Report](#)

[SEND offer](#)

[School Organisation Report](#)

[Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2020](#)

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Version 1: February 2022

