



## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	Thursday, 21 January 2010
<b>Time:</b>	6.00 pm
<b>Venue:</b>	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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### SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

**7. LITERACY LEVELS SCRUTINY REVIEW (Pages 1 - 42)**

The Chair will update the Committee on the review.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
21st JANUARY 2010

REPORT OF THE LITERACY LEVEL SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF LITERACY LEVELS AT KEY STAGE 2 - FINAL REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides background information regarding the Final Report of the Literacy Level Scrutiny Review.

### 1. Background

At the meeting of Children's Services & Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16th September 2008, the Work Programme for the Committee was agreed. One item on the programme was Literacy levels at the time of the children leaving primary schools (end of Key Stage 2).

At the meeting of Children's Services & Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008, the Scope Document for the review was agreed. The three spokespersons, Councillors Sheila Clarke, Frank Doyle and Tony Smith were also appointed as the members of the Literacy Level scrutiny panel. The panel has been supported by a Scrutiny Support Officer, Alan Veitch.

### 2. Focus for the Review

The main issues for the review were identified in the Scope document as:

- the review will include both reading and writing.
- why are levels of achievement so much lower in writing than in reading?
- why are there a number of primary schools below the national average for the percentage of children reaching Level 4 for reading at Key Stage 2?
- why are there a larger number of primary schools below the national average for the percentage of children reaching Level 4 for writing at Key Stage 2?
- what interventions are in place in schools where a significant number of children do not reach Level 4?
- what interventions are in place in schools where only one or two children do not normally reach Level 4?
- are schools satisfied with the support that is available?
- is there a gender issue regarding attainment levels?
- how do deprivation levels affect the attainment levels of children?

### **3. Evidence Gathering**

The Panel have used a number of methods to gather evidence for the review:

School visits  
School questionnaire  
Individual meetings with key officers  
Written evidence

The Panel expresses its thanks to all those who have assisted the review by so readily giving their time, experience and suggestions.

### **4. The Final Report**

The Final Report, which includes twenty-four recommendations, is attached for consideration by the Committee.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That the contents and recommendations of the Literacy Level Scrutiny Review be supported;
- (2) that the Literacy Level Scrutiny Report be presented to the next appropriate Cabinet meeting;
- (3) and that further reports be presented to this Committee to update members regarding the outcomes of the recommendations.

**Sheila Clarke, Frank Doyle, Tony Smith**  
**Panel Members**  
**Literacy Level Scrutiny Panel**  
**Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**05/01/2010**

**SCRUTINY REVIEW  
of  
LITERACY LEVELS AT KEY STAGE 2**



**A REPORT PRODUCED BY  
THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**‘LITERACY LEVELS AT KEY STAGE 2’**  
**SCRUTINY REVIEW**

**FINAL REPORT**

*Page*

<b>1</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY &amp; KEY RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>PANEL MEMBERSHIP.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>BACKGROUND AND ORIGINAL BRIEF.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY FOR THE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>6.1</b>	Introduction - Wirral in the National Context .....	11
<b>6.2</b>	Integrated Services – The Early Years and the role of Children’s Centres .....	14
<b>6.3</b>	Learning Strategies – Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2.....	17
	<b>6.3.1</b> One-to-One Support .....	18
	<b>6.3.2</b> Moderation.....	19
	<b>6.3.3</b> Quality First Teaching.....	19
	<b>6.3.4</b> Speaking and Listening .....	19
	<b>6.3.5</b> Phonics .....	20
	<b>6.3.6</b> Extended Services.....	20
<b>6.4</b>	Social Issues (and Engagement with Parents) .....	21
<b>6.5</b>	Targeted Services .....	23
	<b>6.5.1</b> Special Educational Needs (SEN).....	23
	<b>6.5.2</b> Speech and Language Therapy .....	25
	<b>6.5.3</b> The Gender Issue .....	27
	<b>6.5.4</b> Looked After Children.....	29
	<b>6.5.5</b> English as an Additional Language (EAL).....	29
<b>6.6</b>	Resources .....	30

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**APPENDICES**

<b>1</b>	Scope Document .....	<b>32</b>
<b>2</b>	Questionnaire issued to schools.....	<b>35</b>
<b>3</b>	Reference list of recommendations .....	<b>37</b>
<b>4</b>	List of tables.....	<b>39</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over a number of years, councillors have recognised the concern regarding the number of young people who start secondary school without the apparent literacy skills to adequately further their learning. Anecdotal evidence from the secondary school community suggested a significant and stubborn percentage of young people who fail to reach the expected level. This anecdotal evidence was substantiated by the Borough's SATs results which consistently show almost 20% of children not attaining Level 4 in literacy at Key Stage 2. It was, therefore, decided that further scrutiny work should take place to identify the key issues affecting literacy levels of children during their years in primary education.

The bulk of the evidence for the review was gathered from visits to five schools in the Borough plus a questionnaire which was sent to the head teachers of all remaining primary and junior schools in the Borough. The schools are identified in Section 5, 'Methodology for the Review', page 9. The evidence from the schools was supplemented by meetings with key officers and by written submissions / reports.

The initial brief for the Scrutiny Review was to review literacy levels at Key Stage 2. However, it very quickly became apparent to the Panel members that key issues arise not only when a child is in Years 5 or 6 but much earlier in their development. This drove the review towards an investigation of issues from babyhood to Early Years to Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and finally to Key Stage 2.

As a point of principle, the Panel believes that the needs of the child should be paramount. This principle should be incorporated into future decision-making processes, which must be based on the assessment of the child's needs. The recommendations incorporate this underlying principle.

During this Review, the visits to schools highlighted excellent work being done by both schools and the Local Authority to raise standards in literacy. The Panel members acknowledge that head teachers of primary schools see this as one of their priorities. The Panel would like to place on record their appreciation to staff in all schools in Wirral and the Local Authority officers who are dedicated to raising the standards in literacy. The Panel members recognise that much has already been achieved and that the Key Stage 2 results for pupils in Wirral are above the national average. However, the Panel members remain concerned regarding the tail of underachievement that affects approximately 20% of Key Stage 2 pupils.

The Scrutiny Panel has made a total of 24 recommendations in this Report, all of which are listed in Appendix 3. However, the Panel consider that the following recommendations are those which should be given the highest priority.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

### **A. Measuring the effectiveness of interventions**

The Local Authority and schools are jointly encouraged to provide further evidence regarding the success of specific intervention techniques by greater use of objective criteria.  
(Reference Recommendation 23, Section 6.6, page 31)

### **B. The statementing process for Special Educational Needs**

A review of the statementing process should take place with a view to the system becoming more flexible and quicker, whilst maintaining integrity. There is a need to identify children at a younger age. Consideration should be given to the development of guidelines which would enable children to be allocated places at Orrets Meadow without having to go through the full statementing process.  
(Reference Recommendation 13, Section 6.5.1, page 24)

### **C. Looked After Children and Literacy**

Among Foster Carers, Social Workers and in Residential Homes, a higher priority should be given to literacy. Taking into account the Councillors' role as a Corporate Parent, the Panel members urge that the Child's Annual LAC (Looked After Children) review should emphasise the importance of literacy progress.  
(Reference Recommendation 19, Section 6.5.4, page 29)

### **D. Refresher training for teachers**

Greater access to refresher training for established teachers in speaking, listening and reading skills should be provided. Particular support could also be given to newly qualified teachers and Teaching Assistants. This additional training could be provided through twilight sessions organised in School Cluster Groups.  
(Reference Recommendation 22, Section 6.6, page 31)

### **E. Community Involvement in one-to-one reading support for children**

The Local Authority should provide guidance and support to schools who would like to encourage greater involvement of parents, businesses and older people in providing one-to-one reading support in schools. In return, schools are encouraged to participate in the scheme.  
(Reference Recommendation 5, Section 6.3.1, page 19)

### **F. Inclusion of Literacy activities in Extended Services**

Extended Services should be encouraged to give a higher priority to literacy-based activities.  
(Reference Recommendation 9, Section 6.3.6, page 21)

Continued...



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE FOLLOWING AREAS (CONTINUED):

### **G. The Speech and Language Therapy Service**

The Panel welcomes the current review of the Speech and Language Therapy Service and encourages greater use of therapists in training and consultancy roles.

*(Reference Recommendation 16, Section 6.5.2, page 26)*

The Panel strongly supports the principle of the Speech and Language Service being available either in Children's Centres or School Cluster Groups, whichever is most appropriate.

*(Reference Recommendation 17, Section 6.5.2, page 26)*

Consideration should be given to joint funding (between Wirral NHS and Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council) of the specialist Children's Speech and Language Therapists. The day-to-day management of the Speech and Language Therapists should be within the Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council.

*(Reference Recommendation 18, Section 6.5.2, page 26)*

### **H. Improved multi-agency working**

The Council is encouraged to promote more multi-agency working, specifically by improving protocols for the sharing of information between health, social care and education professionals. This should apply particularly to 'hard to reach' families.

*(Reference Recommendation 12, Section 6.4, page 23)*

### **I. The relationship between Health Visitors and Children's Centres**

Health Visitors are a key contact for many families with young children. Wirral NHS and Wirral Borough Council are encouraged to enhance the role of Health Visitors in providing early identification of 'hard to reach' families and subsequent signposting to other services, particularly in Children's Centres. The delivery of the 'Healthy Child Programme' in Wirral provides an opportunity for agencies to work together.

*(Reference Recommendation 3, Section 6.2, page 17)*

## 2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The main objective behind this Scrutiny Review was to ensure that as many children as possible leave primary school with adequate reading and writing skills. Evidence has been sought from both Council officers and the wider school community in order to guide the deliberations of the Panel members. The Panel hopes that this Scrutiny Review has, in a small way, enabled some of the views of those involved in the education of the Borough's children to be heard and to be reflected in future decision-making.

The aspirations for our children and their literacy standards are demonstrated by the following quote from one head teacher:

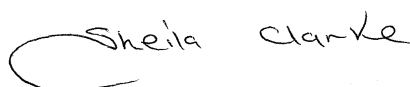
*"We understand that we have a duty to improve the life chances of all, especially those who are unable (or unwilling) to help themselves. This has to be the priority".*

The Panel would like to thank all those people who willingly agreed to contribute and to provide information to this Review. A special 'thank you' is extended to those officers of both Wirral Borough Council and Wirral NHS who contributed positively to the Review, attended interviews or provided information in other ways. In particular, the Panel members record their thanks to all the head teachers, staff, governors and pupils at the five schools which were visited during the course of the Review:

- Cathcart Street Primary School, Birkenhead - head teacher: Rosemarie Bishop
- Higher Bebington Junior School, Higher Bebington - head teacher: Rick Austin
- Hillside Primary School, Prenton - head teacher: Margaret Steele
- Orrets Meadow School, Moreton - head teacher: Sandra Blythe
- Rock Ferry Primary School, Rock Ferry - head teacher: Jan Lambeth

In addition, the head teachers of 22 schools took the time to complete a questionnaire during the course of the Review. The Panel members have endeavoured to take those views into account during the writing of this Report. The involvement of all of the schools was important as they brought a "non-council" perspective to the Review.

Thank you to all for your participation and contributions to this Review.



**Councillor Sheila Clarke (Chair)**

5th January 2010

### 3. PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Literacy Level Scrutiny Panel was appointed by the (now decommissioned) Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2008. The purpose of the Panel is to carry out a Scrutiny Review of literacy levels at Key Stage 2 in Wirral and make any relevant recommendations for improvements.

The members of the Panel are:

Councillor Sheila Clarke (Chair)



Councillor Tony Smith



Councillor Frank Doyle



#### **4. BACKGROUND AND ORIGINAL BRIEF**

For some time, councillors have received officer reports explaining the issues relating to school performance at Key Stages 1 and 2. Throughout that time, the Borough's SATs results have consistently shown almost 20% of children not attaining Level 4 (or better) in literacy at Key Stage 2. It was, therefore, decided that further scrutiny work should take place to identify the key issues affecting literacy levels of children during their years in primary education.

At the meeting of the, now decommissioned, Children's Services & Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16th September 2008, the Work Programme for the Committee was agreed. One item on the programme was Literacy levels at the time of the children leaving primary schools (end of Key Stage 2). It was recognised that the 2008 Key Stage 2 SATs results for English (including Reading and Writing) in Wirral were above the national average. Clearly, there were many examples of good practice in Wirral, which is contributing to the attainment of these results. However, there remained a number of children who do not achieve the 'expected' minimum standard of Level 4 in reading and writing.

At the meeting of the Children's Services & Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008, the Scope Document for the Review was agreed. A copy of the Scope Document is attached as Appendix 1 to this Report. The three party spokespersons (Councillors Sheila Clarke, Frank Doyle and Tony Smith) were also appointed as the members of the Literacy Level Scrutiny Panel.

Among the key issues that members chose to investigate were the following:

- the review will include both reading and writing.
- why are levels of achievement so much lower in writing than in reading?
- why are there a number of primary schools below the national average for the percentage of children reaching Level 4 for reading at Key Stage 2?
- why are there a larger number of primary schools below the national average for the percentage of children reaching Level 4 for writing at Key Stage 2?
- what interventions are in place in schools where a significant number of children do not reach Level 4?
- what interventions are in place in schools where only one or two children do not normally reach Level 4?
- are schools satisfied with the support that is available?
- is there a gender issue regarding attainment levels?
- how do deprivation levels affect the attainment levels of children?

The Panel commenced work in attempting to find answers to these questions.



## 5. METHODOLOGY FOR THE REVIEW

The Panel has employed a number of methods to gather evidence:

### 5.1 Visits to Schools

The following schools were visited:

- Cathcart Street Primary School, Birkenhead
- Higher Bebington Junior School, Higher Bebington
- Hillside Primary School, Prenton
- Orrets Meadow School, Moreton
- Rock Ferry Primary School, Rock Ferry

During these visits, issues have been discussed with head teachers, teachers, school governors and school councils. Each of the visits took half a day. All of the visits were very constructive and highlighted issues relevant to the Review.

### 5.2 'Questionnaire' responses from Schools

Panel members wanted to enable other schools to have an input into the Review. Therefore, a short questionnaire was sent to the head teachers of all remaining primary and junior schools in the Borough. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 2 to this Report. In total, responses were received from the following 22 schools:

Barnston Primary	Our Lady of Pity Catholic Primary
Bedford Drive Primary	Pensby Primary
Black Horse Hill Junior	St Albans Catholic Primary
Cole Street Primary	St Peter's Catholic Primary
Dawpool C E Aided Primary	Saints Peter & Pauls Catholic Primary
Devonshire Park Primary	St Werburgh's Catholic Primary
Fender Primary	Sandbrook Primary
Grove Street Primary	Thingwall Primary
Irby Primary	West Kirby Primary
Mendell Primary	Woodchurch Road Primary
New Brighton Primary	Woodlands Primary

### 5.3 Meetings with Officers

A series of individual meetings has taken place at which the Panel members could discuss relevant issues with key officers from within the Children's Services Department of Wirral Borough Council and Wirral NHS. Prior to the meeting, each officer prepared a short briefing paper.

Meetings were held with the following officers:

- **Pauline Cunningham**, Communications Language & Literacy Development for Early Years, Wirral Borough Council
- **Rosemary Curtis**, Head of Integrated Children's Services, NHS Wirral
- **Sarah Howarth**, Manager of Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service, Wirral Borough Council
- **Catherine Kerr**, Principal Manager for Early Years, Wirral Borough Council
- **Ann Kotwal**, Curriculum Leader for Family Learning, Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service, Wirral Borough Council
- **Sue Lang**, Study Support, Wirral Borough Council
- **Marie Lawrence**, Early Years & Primary Education Strategic Service Manager, Wirral Borough Council
- **Jennie Richmond**, English Consultant for Key Stage 1 and 2, Wirral Borough Council
- **Bridie Sharkey**, Principal Manager for English 0–19, Wirral Borough Council
- **Deirdre Smith**, Principal Manager, Study Support, Wirral Borough Council

## 5.4 Written Evidence

Written evidence was received from a variety of sources including the following:

### National evidence

The Rose Report – Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report

A World First for West Dunbartonshire – The Elimination of Reading Failure: Tom Burkard

Raising attainment at Key Stage Two – Medway Council Scrutiny Review

Influences and levers on low levels of attainment: A Review of Literature and Policy Initiatives (DCSF Research Brief, April 2009)

### Wirral Evidence

'Early Years Provision in Wirral' - Report of the Director of Children's Services to the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Wirral Parenting and Family Support Strategy 2008-2011

Wirral Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Wirral NHS, September 2008

Annual Performance Assessment of Wirral Borough Council by Ofsted, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2008

One-to-One Tuition, Report to School standards Sub-Committee, Wirral Borough Council, July 2009

Wirral Borough Council Website – Various pages

### Statistical Evidence

Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council (data regarding Key Stage attainment relevant to Wirral, Statistical and Geographical Neighbours and England)

Asset Management Team, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council (data regarding Orrets Meadow attendees)



## 6. EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Introduction – Wirral in the National Context

The most recent Annual Performance Assessment of Wirral Borough Council's service for children and young people, issued by OFSTED on 17 December 2008, awarded an accreditation of Grade 3 ('Good') for 'Enjoying and achieving'. The letter includes the comment that:

*"Good outcomes have been maintained in the area of enjoying and achieving and educational outcomes at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 remain above those of similar councils".*

Further comments include:

*"Results at Key Stage 2 have (also) improved, particularly in English and Science".*

*"The Council has maintained the steady improvement of educational results in Key Stage 2,3 and 4.....".*

However the report also notes that:

*"Key Stage 1 results in reading, writing and mathematics declined in 2007 but at a faster rate than nationally".*

A key indicator is the number of children achieving the 'expected' level of 4 at Key Stage 2. Table 1 shows the percentage of children achieving Level 4 (or better) in English, Reading and Writing. (In SATs results, the English result is a combination of the Reading and Writing results). The table compares statistics for Wirral with the national average as well as the performance of a number of statistical neighbours and geographical neighbours.

**Table 1: Statistical Neighbours and Geographical Neighbours, Key Stage 2, English, Level 4 and above**

All pupils	English %L4+		
	2007	2008	2009 (provisional)
National	80	81	80
Wirral	82	84	83
<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>			
Bury	83	85	84
Darlington	79	80	84
Halton	82	84	80
Lancashire	81	82	81
Leeds	81	81	78
Sefton	85	86	83
St Helens	81	84	83
Stockton-on-Tees	81	84	81
Tameside	81	83	81
Telford and Wrekin	78	77	77
<b>Geographical Neighbours</b>			
Halton	82	84	80
Knowsley	77	80	79
Liverpool	77	80	78
Sefton	85	86	83
St Helens	81	84	83
Wigan	81	83	81

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

On this evidence, Wirral is not the top achiever, but is significantly above average.



Table 2 (below) shows the percentage of children attaining each level at Key Stage 2. This data reports the provisional results for 2009. Again, the Wirral scores are above the national average for each of the English, Reading and Writing classifications. However, it should be noted that the table highlights the differential in attainment in both Wirral and at a national level in reading as opposed to writing.

The lower half of Table 2 also shows a gender split for Wirral children and highlights the difference in the attainment of boys and girls; the differential being higher in writing than in reading. The relative performance of girls and boys is discussed in further detail in Section 6.5.3 (page 27) of this report – ‘The Gender Issue’. It should be noted that the percentage of Wirral girls achieving Level 4 at Key Stage 2 for reading is 6.4% higher than for boys. The differential for writing is even larger at 13.7%.

**Table 2: Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, 2009 (provisional) data, National and Wirral comparison**

Wirral 2009 (provisional) data		Percentage								Percentage	
		A	D	N	B	L2	L3	L4	L5	L4+	L5+
<b>All pupils Wirral</b>											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.5	3.2	0.5	12.0	49.0	34.0	83.0	34.0
	Reading	0.7	0.1	1.9	3.2	0.0	6.8	36.6	50.8	87.4	50.8
	Writing	0.6	0.1	0.6	3.2	0.0	24.2	46.9	24.4	71.4	24.4
<b>All pupils National</b>											
	English	1	N/A	1	4	1	14	51	29	80	29
	Reading	1	N/A	3	4	0	7	38	47	86	47
	Writing	0	N/A	1	4	0	27	48	19	67	19
<b>Boys Wirral</b>											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.7	4.1	0.7	15.5	50.9	27.4	78.4	27.4
	Reading	0.7	0.1	2.4	4.1	0.0	8.4	38.9	45.4	84.3	45.4
	Writing	0.6	0.1	0.8	4.1	0.0	29.8	45.8	18.9	64.7	18.9
<b>Girls Wirral</b>											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.3	2.3	0.3	8.4	47.0	41.0	87.9	41.0
	Reading	0.6	0.1	1.3	2.3	0.0	5.0	34.2	56.5	90.7	56.5
	Writing	0.7	0.1	0.4	2.3	0.0	18.2	48.1	30.3	78.4	30.3

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

<b>Key to columns:</b>	
A	pupils who were absent
D	pupils disapplied from teacher assessment
N	pupils who took the tests but failed to register a level
B	pupils who were working below the level of the test
L2-5	pupils attaining those Levels in the test
L4+	pupils attaining Level 4 or better
L5+	pupils attaining Level 5 or better

The performance of Wirral’s children can be put into further perspective by Table 3, which shows the absolute numbers of children achieving each Level. The table compares statistics for 2008 and the provisional results for 2009. It is worth noting that, of the total cohort of 3,534 in 2009, 2,934 children achieved the ‘expected’ level (or better) in English. For those children and their schools, this is a considerable achievement. However, it should also be noticed that, for a variety of reasons, 600 children did not reach this level. Indeed, this worrying aspect is more pronounced in writing where 1,012 children did not achieve the ‘expected’ level in 2009. In this respect, 2009 is little different from previous years. **It is for this reason that much of the deliberations of the Panel and the focus for the remainder of this Report seeks to identify why the number achieving Level 4 is not higher and what can be done to boost this number in the future.**



**Table 3: Numbers of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, 2008 and 2009 (provisional) data**

All Wirral Pupils		Pupil Numbers								
		A	D	N	B	L2	L3	L4	L5	L4+
2008										
	English	35	2	25	100	15	424	1909	1199	3108
	Reading	29	2	71	100	0	214	1403	1886	3289
	Writing	23	2	60	100	0	899	1754	867	2621
2009 (provisional)										
	English	25	2	17	113	18	425	1731	1203	2934
	Reading	24	2	67	113	0	239	1294	1795	3089
	Writing	22	2	21	113	0	854	1658	864	2522

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

Key to columns:	
A	pupils who were absent
D	pupils disapplied from teacher assessment
N	pupils who took the tests but failed to register a level
B	pupils who were working below the level of the test
L2-5	pupils attaining those Levels in the test
L4+	pupils attaining Level 4 or better
L5+	pupils attaining Level 5 or better

An historical perspective of the Key Stage 2 results is displayed in Table 4. The percentages achieving each Level are shown for English, Reading and Writing over the previous six years (2004 to 2009). The results show a consistent improvement until the provisional 2009 results which show a decline in the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or better in English for the first time since 2005.

**Table 4: Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, Wirral, Historical comparison (2004-2009)**

All Wirral pupils		Percentage									
		A	D	N	B	L2	L3	L4	L5	L4+	L5+
2009 (provisional)											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.5	3.2	0.5	12.0	49.0	34.0	83.0	34.0
	Reading	0.7	0.1	1.9	3.2	0.0	6.8	36.6	50.8	87.4	50.8
	Writing	0.6	0.1	0.6	3.2	0.0	24.2	46.9	24.4	71.4	24.4
2008											
	English	0.9	0.1	0.6	2.7	0.4	10.9	50.7	33.7	84.4	33.7
	Reading	0.9	0.1	1.9	2.7	0.0	5.7	37.8	51.0	88.8	51.0
	Writing	0.7	0.1	0.9	2.7	0.0	23.6	47.8	24.3	72.0	24.3
2007											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.6	3.6	0.5	12.7	48.2	33.6	81.8	33.6
	Reading	0.6	0.1	2.5	3.6	0.0	7.5	36.1	49.6	85.7	49.6
	Writing	0.5	0.1	1.1	3.6	0.0	26.8	48.8	19.1	67.9	19.1
2006											
	English	0.7	0.1	1.2	2.4	0.7	13.7	46.5	34.7	81.2	34.7
	Reading	0.6	0.1	2.9	2.4	0.0	9.1	35.6	49.3	84.9	49.3
	Writing	0.6	0.1	2.2	2.4	0.0	24.8	52.0	17.8	69.8	17.8
2005											
	English	0.8	0.0	1.7	2.5	0.7	13.3	51.5	29.3	80.9	29.3
	Reading	0.6	0.0	3.7	2.5	0.0	7.0	40.6	45.6	86.2	45.6
	Writing	0.7	0.0	2.6	2.5	0.0	29.6	47.9	16.6	64.5	16.6
2004											
	English	1.0	0.1	1.3	2.6	0.8	12.3	50.4	31.5	81.8	31.5
	Reading	0.8	0.1	2.6	2.6	0.0	7.0	43.4	43.4	86.8	43.4
	Writing	0.8	0.1	2.5	2.6	0.0	23.8	49.0	21.2	70.2	21.2

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

Key to columns:	
A	pupils who were absent
D	pupils disapplied from teacher assessment
N	pupils who took the tests but failed to register a level
B	pupils who were working below the level of the test
L2-5	pupils attaining those Levels in the test
L4+	pupils attaining Level 4 or better
L5+	pupils attaining Level 5 or better

While the percentage of children attaining Level 4 (or better) is a key target, the percentage achieving lower than Level 3 is of concern. Government statistics show that, every year, around 6-7% of eleven year olds in England leave primary school with very poor literacy skills (below Level 3 in English). This represents a literacy level equivalent to that of the average seven or eight year old.

The proportion of children leaving primary school with very poor literacy skills has remained largely static over time, although the results in Wirral have been better than the national average. This is supported by Table 5 below:

**Table 5: Percentage of pupils achieving below Level 3, Key Stage 2, English, Historical Comparison (2004-2009), England and Wirral comparison**

English below Level 3		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009 (prov)
England	Percentage	7.0	7.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Wirral	Percentage	4.8	4.9	4.3	4.8	3.7	4.2

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

Note: 'Below Level 3' equates to a combination of Levels 2, B and N, where:  
 B pupils who were working below the level of the test  
 N pupils who took the tests but failed to register a level

Information on the profile of these very low-attaining children is available from an analysis of national data conducted by the Primary National Strategy:

- a very high proportion (68%) of the children with very poor literacy skills are boys. This over-representation is much greater for literacy than for mathematics, where only 55% of the very low achievers are boys.
- more of the children than would be expected from total population figures are summer-born – 40% in the low attaining group compared to 34% of the total cohort.
- the children are much more likely to be living in poverty than their better-reading peers. 38% of those attaining below Level 3 in English are eligible for free school meals, compared to 17% of all children.
- they are more likely to be learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) than the population as a whole (15% compared to 10%).

In the national context, the Rose Report, 'Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum', published in April 2009, is likely to set the context for primary education in years to come. In addition, the announcement by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families that the policy of national strategies for schools will come to an end, will force further change. The new vision foresees the establishment of new networks of school-to-school support whereby neighbouring schools can procure their own advisers to help them drive up teaching standards and examination results. The forthcoming General Election, due by June 2010, adds further uncertainty to the national picture.

In the local context, one head teacher commented to the Panel that:

*"When assessing the success of a school regarding literacy levels, it is important to look at the bigger picture; not just at curriculum, intervention strategies, and so on. The ethos of the school is far more important than a reading or writing scheme".*

It is the case that every school is different with its own practices and culture. However, every school in each community has a variety of different challenges. The Report will now explore some of those challenges and will investigate some of the reasons why greater numbers of children are not reaching the 'expected' Level 4 at Key Stage 2.

## 6.2 Integrated Services – The Early Years and the role of Children's Centres

This Scrutiny Review started by investigating literacy levels in primary schools. However, it quickly became clear from the evidence that a child starts to develop literacy skills in Early Years and pre-school.

**"Many children have an impoverishment of language at Foundation Stage".**  
 Head teacher

One professional commented that:

*“Literacy is an issue that needs to be looked at from babyhood onwards”.*

Another officer commented that:

*“Good verbal communication and listening skills are essential to children being able to develop good literacy skills – if you are unable to express yourself well verbally, you are unlikely to be able to express yourself well in writing”.*

While another added:

*“If children are not confident communicators, they will not be confident readers and writers”.*

One of the fundamental issues identified during the school visits is the concern relating to the quality of language skills of many children on entry to Foundation Stage. One head teacher commented that:

*“Most of the children are below the expected floor level at Foundation Stage, especially with respect to language. Many children have an impoverishment of language at Foundation Stage”.*

This was a comment also echoed in the Rose Report:

*“The perception of primary schools visited by the review (The Rose Review) is that more children are entering primary schools with impoverished language and poor social development. This issue was also highlighted in the Bercow Report”.*

The responses from schools in the questionnaire provided further evidence. When asked ‘What are the key issues affecting literacy development in your school?’, a significant number of head teachers responded with comments such as:

*“Children entering school well below the age-expected development in speaking and listening.”*

*“Weak speaking and listening skills.”*

*“Below par language skills prior to attending Foundation 1.”*

*“Language acquisition levels on entry to school.”*

*“Low levels on entry. Pre-school experience in story and language is limited.”*

*“Entering school with low levels of ability.”*

*“Some children enter Foundation Stage 2 with poor language skills.”*

*“On entry to Foundation Stage 2 pupils’ average development levels are often below national averages.”*

*“Low level of speaking and listening for many children on entry.”*

*“Increasing levels of children entering school with speech and language delays or difficulties.”*

This evidence from professional staff and from head teachers convinced the Panel members that the quality of Early Years education does have an impact on later literacy skills. The same head teachers often referred to a lack of parental involvement and support at home for the child. For many children, though not all, there is a common thread. This is clearly an important issue for many schools.

The advent of SureStart and the growth in the number of Children’s Centres has widened the opportunity for pre-school provision to be offered to a larger number of children. The number of Children’s Centres in Wirral has now risen to 18, with a further eight satellite centres. It is appreciated that the development of Children’s Centres is an ongoing programme and progress to date is welcomed. However, there is little available evidence to prove that the service is reaching all of the target groups. For instance, the Panel members have been unable to obtain attendance figures for the Children’s Centres and the profile of those attendees.

A consistent issue for those schools in the more deprived areas of the Borough was the difficulty in connecting with the 'hard to reach' families in their community. The same families are less likely to make use of the Children's Centres. Whilst it is acknowledged that great effort is made to achieve this objective and that attendance at Children's Centres is not statutory, more needs to be done. One professional commented that:

*"Further work needs to be done to get more families in to the Children's Centres".*

A number of issues were raised with respect to access to services in the Children's Centres:

- **Level of provision**

There are different levels of provision in the Children's Centres. The level of provision differs depending upon whether the centre provides the 'full core offer' or is a satellite centre. Some of the centres have joint managers, which also affects the level of provision. Therefore, there is a variety of effectiveness in provision. In the future, it would be useful to look at the uniformity of provision and at the relationship with the school where the centre is on a shared site.

- **Organisational teams**

In some areas, the Children's Centre teams do not coincide geographically with the Area teams. One senior officer suggested that there may be some mileage in bringing those boundaries together. This will support cohesion in the communities.

- **Distance to some centres within the cluster**

The distance from some 'target' communities to the nearest Children's Centre can be significant in some cases where public transport does not make the journey easy.

- **Website information**

The Panel members are pleased to acknowledge that, during the course of the Review, information regarding more Children's Centres has become available on the Council website. (All of this information had not been available in August 2009). However, the information on the website does not give specific details of the facilities / sessions available at each Children's Centre.

- **Publicity**

Some evidence has been found of residents finding it difficult to find information regarding the facilities at their nearest Children's Centre.

- **Summer opening hours**

The opening hours at some Centres appeared to reduce during the summer holidays at a time when families may need additional support.

**"Children's Centres are not just a building; it is services".**  
Officer

**"Money is not the key issue. It's the service – re-design it".**  
Officer referring to the Early Years Service

A future challenge for the Children's Centres is the increased hours of free provision that have been announced by the Government. In the future, three and four-year old children will be entitled to 15 hours (rather than 12.5) free education per week. This may well create capacity issues for some Children's Centres.

It has already been suggested at an earlier meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the operation Children's Centres in Wirral would be a suitable topic for an in-depth scrutiny review in the future. The Panel members fully endorse that view.

**Recommendation 1 – The evidence gathered shows that successful interventions in the Early Years do impact on literacy skills. A Children and Young People Departmental review should be carried out to ensure that easy access and an appropriate offer of service is provided in all Children's Centres.**

**Recommendation 2 – In order to ensure that more families engage with Children's Centres, information available through websites should be improved and be timely. There should be better promotion of specific activities, including pre-reading programmes, available at each Centre. Publicity could also be improved through a variety of outlets such as GP surgeries, local organisations and community groups.**

An issue relevant to both Early Years and to Schools were the perceived limitations in joined-up or multi-agency working. Recognition of improvements since the creation of the Children and Young People Department was apparent. However, again, more needs to be done. As previously said, the service offering in Children's Centres is varied. Some centres offer a wider service, the delivery of which requires greater joined-up working between the agencies. It was apparent that some centres have been more successful in developing a close working relationship with Health Visitors. In turn, this has enabled the Health Visitors to provide early identification of families, who otherwise, may have been reticent to make use of Children's Centre facilities. However, as one professional commented:

*"With reference to the involvement of Health Visitors in Children's Centres, there is nothing formally in place. Some Centres seem to do their own thing."*

Nevertheless, in some cases, due to the longstanding close working relationship between Health Visitors and some of the Sure Start Local Programmes, the Health Visitors promote the Children's Centre and make lots of referrals. As a result, in some areas there are fewer vulnerable families who are not included, but too much depends on the individual Health Visitor. From the perspective of the family, the Health Visitor provides a very accessible service. There is no stigma attached to a visit from the Health Visitor. As the 'Healthy Child Programme' is developed and implemented by NHS Wirral, further opportunities will arise for the identification of more vulnerable families and children. It is important that integrated working enables these children to gain maximum access to the Children's Centres.

In addition, the programme launched from September 2009, to offer free nursery places to 142 of the most disadvantaged two year olds in the Borough offers a real opportunity for integrated working between the Health Visitors and the Children's Centres. The Health Visitors will help to identify the children and then to ensure that, along with a family support worker, wrap-around support is provided to ensure good quality play and learning experience. Indeed, the progress that has already been made on schemes such as this provides evidence that some good joined-up work is taking place.

Nevertheless, one education professional commented:

*"We talk about joined-up thinking; but we need joined-up action."*

Further examples where more integrated working would be beneficial are explored in greater detail in other sections of this Report. Reference is made to social workers in Section 6.4 ('Social Issues and engagement with parents'); while the Speech and Language Therapy Service is covered in Section 6.5.2 ('Speech and Language Therapy').

In general, a strong case can be made for as many services as feasible being provided in one building. A 'One Stop' provision for children's services would undoubtedly improve the accessibility of those services to many families. This is in line with the reference in the Executive Summary that "As a point of principle, the panel believes that the needs of the child should be paramount". In terms of breaking down perceived barriers between organisations and departments, joint training sessions may help to remove obstacles.

**Recommendation 3 – Health Visitors are a key contact for many families with young children. Wirral NHS and Wirral Borough Council are encouraged to enhance the role of Health Visitors in providing early identification of 'hard to reach' families and subsequent signposting to other services, particularly in Children's Centres. The delivery of the 'Healthy Child Programme' in Wirral provides an opportunity for agencies to work together.**

**Recommendation 4 – Professional barriers need to be broken down. Multi-agency services should be provided via Children's Centres, for example, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Dental Service, Speech and Language Therapists, School Nurse, Hearing and Sight Specialists, Paediatricians, Early Years Specialists, and so on.**

### **6.3 Learning Strategies – Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2**

The Panel members were struck by one particular comment by a head teacher:

**"Literacy is in all subjects".**  
Head teacher

*"Endless hours are spent on maintaining data systems. However, although that is important, it is not as important as the impact of teaching".*

In describing the basic pre-requisites for successful reading as basic skills, confidence and motivation, an officer reflected that:

*"Many children can get by, but by Year 8 when asked to do research, they can't do it".*

There are a number of reasons for some children not progressing as well as they might, including:

- not skilled in phonics strategies;
- not confident in reading / writing;
- not enough practice.

The visits to the schools and the questionnaire responses provided many examples of good teaching and initiatives regarded by the Panel members as good practice. These included the use of peer mentors / peer readers, reading champions in schools, topic learning, personalised learning and the extensive use in many schools of the 'Big Write' which engaged many young people very effectively. Many schools have successfully adapted the concept of the 'Big Write' to meet the requirements of their locality. Indeed, the suggestion has been made that the Council could develop a Local Authority Writing Week to build on the experiences of the 'Big Write'. With respect to personalised learning, some interesting examples were identified where the pupil's writing book includes a detailed assessment of their written work. Therefore, children can see what they are doing well and what they need to improve. In one case, a school had developed a personal laminated book marker which identified similar information with respect to the pupil's reading progress and providing individual targets.

### 6.3.1 One-to-One Support

The impact of One-to-One learning is an interesting development.

When asked 'What other support would you like for the challenges that face your school?', one head teacher responded:

*"More of the 1:1 tuition schemes and other funding streams to allow schools to personalise learning".*

While another commented that:

*"1:1 tuition has a positive impact on lower attainers".*

Another requested:

*"More 1:1 tutoring for boys out of and within school time".*

And another commented that a barrier to learning was:

*"Need more individual support on a 1 to 1 basis for some children".*

The Panel welcomes the forthcoming evaluation of the initiative to provide one-to-one tuition being carried out in Wirral through the 'Making Good Progress' Pilot. Early indications from schools would suggest that the scheme is providing positive results. It is envisaged that by 2010-11, 300,000 pupils a year, nationally, will receive one-to-one tuition in English. The support is aimed at those pupils who are deemed to be capable of achieving Level 4 in Key Stage 2 but need additional support to do so.

In addition, the use of one-to-one support in schools, using evidence from such schemes as the 'Successful Reading Partnership', has shown an encouraging impact on both the children and the parents / grandparents who deliver the support. Such programmes can encourage the deliverers to improve their skills and improve their confidence in working with children.

While the 'Successful Reading Partnership' is a specific scheme aimed at boosting pupils who are just below average, the principle of schools using outside help in order to boost their activities is applauded. Interesting projects, such as the Reading Buddies scheme in Peterborough and the Ablaze project in Bristol have engaged businesses in supporting primary children to read on a one-to-one basis. While this support is clearly not an alternative to trained teachers, it could enable some schools, particularly those who struggle to engage parents in school activities, to give pupils additional one-to-one reading time. In addition, it may be possible to involve groups such as the Older People's Parliament in helping to organise a scheme. Indeed, a recent scheme in Chester aimed to promote intergenerational understanding by encouraging older people to become more involved in school life.



**Recommendation 5 – The Local Authority should provide guidance and support to schools who would like to encourage greater involvement of parents, businesses and older people in providing one-to-one reading support in schools. In return, schools are encouraged to participate in the scheme.**

### 6.3.2 Moderation

As discussed in Section 6.2, there is considerable concern regarding the level of language skills at the time of entry to Foundation Stage. The accurate assessment of children at significant time points is essential in order to measure progress. The Panel appreciates that the Local Authority has done a lot of work on moderation and progress has been made. However, this issue continues to be highlighted as an issue by schools and, therefore, more work needs to be done. Procedures to support consistent assessment procedures for Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 are essential. This is a particular issue where children change schools, especially where Infant schools feed into Junior schools. One head teacher responded to the Panel with the comment: *“The school’s base line assessment highlights a mismatch with the Key Stage 1 SATs results, which is nothing short of dramatic”.*

Referring to the intake from Infant schools, another head teacher commented that: *“The number of children reaching Level 3 at Key Stage 1 has now halved over recent years. This is not because the children are performing any worse; it is due to more rigorous marking of the tests by the teachers. As a result, the marking of Key Stage 1 has got more realistic”.*

A further head teacher added: *“The school has suffered greatly from inaccurate teacher assessment for a number of years. However, it is now much more accurate”.*

While further work is required for Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, a similar focus also needs to be applied to the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Indeed, some head teachers commented that stronger emphasis should be placed on speaking and listening skills throughout the assessment processes.

**Recommendation 6 – The Local Authority is encouraged to build on the moderation work that has already been carried out at the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. This consistent approach should also be applied to the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Schools are encouraged to work with each other and with the Local Authority to deliver the consistent approach.**

### 6.3.3 Quality First Teaching

The Rose Report observes that: *“Nowhere is an entitlement to ‘quality first teaching’ more necessary or important than in equipping every child with a command of reading and writing skills”.*

A Wirral officer also commented that: *“A lot of time and money is invested in one-to-one interventions. However, there has also to be an emphasis on ‘Quality First Teaching’ in order to minimise the number of children who need further help”.*

The maximum use of high quality trained practitioners working in low ratios is a goal to be aimed for.

### 6.3.4 Speaking and Listening

A major strand of the Rose Report is the emphasis on speaking and listening. Recommendation 9 of the Rose Report reads:

*“Primary schools should make sure that children’s spoken communication is developed intensively within all subjects and for learning across the curriculum. In so doing, schools should capitalise on the powerful contributions of the performing and visual arts, especially role play and drama”.*

The Rose Report continues:

*“For the purposes of this review literacy is regarded as covering speaking, listening, reading and writing. Discussion of reading and writing in primary education sometimes fails to recognise the central importance of developing children’s spoken communication”.*

Followed by:

*“Better progress is being made in this respect through government-funded initiatives such as Time for Talk and Every Child a Talker. However, schools would do well to take stock of how effectively they provide opportunities, for example, for children to enlarge their vocabulary, listen attentively and talk confidently and intensively about their work and experiences across all aspects of the curriculum to a range of audiences”.*

In the local context, one officer commented that:

*“With regard to the Rose report, listening and speaking are central, which is very heartening”.*

While another added that:

*“The Rose review has emphasised ‘speaking and listening’ and the importance of children having word recognition. Weak communication skills have been identified as a major issue”.*

It is welcome that Wirral has become a funded authority for the ‘Every Child a Talker’ programme, the focus of which is to encourage children to start talking earlier. Although an Early Years Programme, it is in this context that the Communications, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) programme seems to be particularly important. Although a relatively new programme which has been rolled out progressively into targeted Children’s centres / schools, it is essential that a comprehensive evaluation of that programme takes place and, if deemed successful, adequate long-term funding should be identified.

**Recommendation 7 – The Local Authority should evaluate the success of the Communications, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) programme and plan ahead to embed good practice in schools currently involved in the programme and promote that good practice to other schools.**

### 6.3.5 Phonics

The Rose Report makes the following argument:

*“...the main obstacles have been long-standing systematic confusion and conflicting views, especially about the teaching of phonics. As more research and practice now converge in strong support of high-quality, systematic phonic work, schools can be confident that their investment in good-quality phonics training for teachers and in good systematic phonic programmes, whether commercial or provided by the national strategies, will yield high returns for children”.*

This was certainly a view supported in the local context by officers who were encouraging the greater availability of training for teachers in phonological awareness. In this perspective, perhaps the detailed working knowledge and application of phonics at Orrets Meadow could be used as a source of trainers which can be more widely utilised across the Borough.

**Recommendation 8 – The Local Authority is encouraged to provide further in-school training in phonological awareness and schools are encouraged to fully participate in the training opportunities.**

### 6.3.6 Extended Services

Extended Services has now established a more prominent role in the relationship with schools. It is important that these out-of-school activities give as high a priority as possible to literacy. A 2009 Wirral Council report on Extended Services comments that:

*“As a result of the lead for Extended Services being within the Learning and Achievement Branch, the Extended Services work is being linked with a whole range of other activities, especially:*

- *School improvement and raising standards work*
- *Early Years and Children’s Centres work*
- *Family and Lifelong Learning work*
- *Narrowing the Gap work”.*



Inclusion of literacy activities should, therefore, be extended where possible. However, it should be recognised that as Extended Services are expected to be self-funding, charging for services may act as an inhibitor. This may impact on the take-up among some of the 'target' groups. In order to combat the 'hard to reach' issue, at least one Extended School cluster has allocated funding towards the cost of transport. This is specifically aimed at trying to involve those young people who otherwise would be less likely to participate.

**Recommendation 9 – Extended Services should be encouraged to give a higher priority to literacy-based activities.**

#### 6.4 Social Issues (and Engagement with Parents)

For some schools in the more deprived areas in the Borough, the biggest barriers to learning are the social problems and issues faced within the community. At one school that was visited by the Panel members, the head teacher spent eight hours during the previous week dealing with social issues directly affecting pupils at the school. One head teacher commented that:

**“The biggest problem is the inconsistency in children’s lives that impact on their learning”.**  
Head teacher

*“I feel that I am an advocate for the children.”*

While another said that:

*“As a school, we understand the barriers of social deprivation but we do not see it as an excuse”.*

And another added that:

*“The children are greatly impacted by the aggression that they see outside of school”.*

Meanwhile an education officer commented that:

*“We can’t influence deprivation but we can influence parental attitude towards education”.*

A snapshot on the impact of deprivation on literacy levels can be provided by Table 6. This shows by District and Area in Wirral, the percentage of pupils receiving free school meals and the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 (or better) in English at Key Stage 2. As would be expected, a broad correlation can be noted. The statistics suggest that an area with a lower percentage of free school meals is more likely to achieve higher Key Stage results.

**Table 6: Comparison of pupils receiving Free School Meals and pupils achieving Level 4 or above, Key Stage 2, English, 2009 (provisional) data, by District and Area in Wirral**

District / Area	Number of pupils	% Free School Meals	English, % Level 4+, 2009 (provisional)
Birkenhead District	997	43.2	76.5
Bidston & St James / Claughton	382	51.0	77.7
Prenton / Oxton	250	15.2	85.6
Birkenhead and Tranmere / Rock Ferry	365	54.2	69.0
Wallasey District	1001	34.6	81.4
Liscard / Seacombe	362	43.9	78.7
New Brighton / Wallasey	349	24.9	83.7
Leasowe & Moreton East / Moreton West & Saughall Massie	290	34.5	82.1
Wirral South District	627	17.4	86.3
Clatterbridge / Bebington	310	11.0	89.0
Bromborough / Eastham	317	23.7	83.6
Wirral West District	861	13.6	90.2
Pensby & Thingwall / Heswall	277	7.6	91.7
Hoyle & Meols / West Kirby & Thurstaston	252	8.3	95.2
Greasby, Frankby & Irby / Upton	332	22.6	85.2

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

A key issue for a significant number of schools is how to engage more effectively with parents especially the hard-to-reach?

Involvement of parents in supporting their children through school is patchy and some have low aspirations and live dysfunctional lives. As a consequence, there is an outcome of children facing a poverty of experience outside school. The problem can often be compounded by there being a significant number of young parents who have never moved off particular estates. Their parenting skills mirror those with which they were brought up. Therefore, early intervention is vital to support parenting skills. Wirral's Parenting Strategy is an impressive document. The difficulty comes in its application on the ground.

**"Many of our children live in dysfunctional homes".**

Head teacher

The Family Learning Service "offers parents, carers and children the chance to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills in safe, welcoming environments". The fun activities, such as 'Literacy through Sport', which is aimed at dads and children, appears to bring positive benefits. Some schools expressed their satisfaction with the Family Works programme. However, whilst meeting the needs of a relative few (because the criteria being used is determined by the funding structure of the Learning Skills Council) more families would benefit if the service was more universally available. There are some cases where a child's literacy skills are severely hampered by poor parenting skills and, in some cases, their parents' literacy skills. It is in these cases that Family Works can deliver tangible benefits.

Analysis of data in the Family Works Programme (2007-8) showed that the reading scores of children (in the Free School Meals cohort) were on average 6% higher than children (again in the Free School Meals cohort) whose parents did not attend the programme. A similar comparison showed a 10% differential in writing scores. The evidence from one school where use is made of the Family Works programme during Foundation Stage was encouraging. Parents are invited in and worries about children can be discussed. Parents are encouraged to develop 'learning activities' at home for their children. Although there were twelve participants during 2008-9, it was judged to be very difficult to get parents to participate. However, the school reported a big impact on those who do take part.

A specific issue for the Family Learning Service, as it is for all agencies, is the identification and targeting of the 'pockets' of vulnerable families outside the most deprived areas. It is important that these families are reached. Greater partnership working, for example, by services linking closely to the Health Visitors may help improve the identification of families and the subsequent delivery of specific services.

**Recommendation 10 – The impact of the Family Learning Service is welcomed. With the forthcoming changes to Learning Skills Council arrangements, the Local Authority should consider how the service could be made more universally available.**

Within the school environment, some schools struggle to get involvement of parents either in directly supporting school activities or by encouraging their children at home. Indeed, one school is simply unable to foster a culture of homework being done and returned. There is significant evidence of some children never having the opportunity to read books in their home environment.

One head teacher reported that:

*"There is a culture that homework doesn't matter to many parents or children".*

Another school reported significant issues with attendance and punctuality.

With respect to the care of vulnerable children, there was evidence of some frustration regarding the relationship between schools and the Children's Social Services Department of Wirral Borough Council. This frustration could be heard in the words of one head teacher:

*"There is a desire for people from different departments (education, social care and health) to work together but there are still barriers. Sometimes people can be reluctant to open out and work together. There are lots of little islands".*

It has been suggested that the relationship would be improved if a school (or cluster of schools) was allocated a named social worker with whom issues could be discussed on a consistent and confidential basis. There was evidence suggesting that there are too many agencies working with the same families. Again, improved multi-agency working should help. It is acknowledged that much preliminary work is being undertaken to establish greater locality-based working in Wirral. However, the new structure will not be fully implemented until 2011.

**Recommendation 11 – Greater emphasis should be given to the provision of a consistent link between schools and Children’s Social Care Services. A Social Worker should be allocated to either a Children’s Centre or a School Cluster Group, wherever is most appropriate.**

**Recommendation 12 – The Council is encouraged to promote more multi-agency working, specifically by improving protocols for the sharing of information between health, social care and education professionals. This should apply particularly to ‘hard to reach’ families.**

The Panel members recognise the additional pressures that social problems bring to local communities and specifically to schools. A head teacher commented that:

*“An aspiration is the provision in the school of a Learning mentor, who would support children in such aspects as their emotional well-being, goal-setting, anger management and raising aspirations”.*

The allocation of additional resource to assist schools in supporting such aims and in managing attendance / punctuality problems, supporting relationships with parents and so on would be beneficial.

**“There is a constant struggle to manage trailing-edge children with apathetic parents”.**  
Head teacher

## **6.5 Targeted Services for Specific Groups**

### **6.5.1 Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

**“A child has to have dire problems in order to get a statement”.**  
Head teacher

When children are assessed as requiring Special Educational Needs (SEN), school based provision of School Action and School Action Plus is available. School Action could include further assessment, additional teaching materials or a different way of teaching. If a child is deemed not to have made adequate progress during School Action, School Action Plus enables a school to seek outside advice from the Local Authority’s support services or from health and social work professionals.

If a child’s needs cannot be met through School Action Plus, the Local Authority may consider the need for a statutory assessment. Following the assessment, the Local Authority may decide to make a Statement of Special Educational Needs setting out the child’s needs in details. However, beyond the statementing process, there are a considerable number of children who are viewed by their school as requiring additional support.

For many schools who responded to the Panel, the requirements of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) provide a significant challenge. For several schools, a significant part of the school budget is used to support SEN children.

One head teacher responded to the Panel by explaining:

*“One in five pupils in school is on the SEN register – mostly specific literacy problems. The constant challenge is trying to provide extra targeted support for these children”.*

Concerns were raised regarding the statementing process. Some head teachers expressed frustration regarding the speed and lack of flexibility of the process. As an example, of those children who are admitted into Orrets Meadow, the majority arrive in Year 5 and some in Year 6. Some of these children arrive at the school with a reading age as low as 4.3 years. By the time of admission, the child has often become frightened, frustrated and their self-esteem has been damaged.

While it is accepted that many children are supported through the interventions at their ‘primary’ school, culminating in Wave 3, the quicker identification of children with significant problems would be beneficial to child and school alike. In general, quicker access to outside agencies to support children where Wave 3 intervention highlights specific learning difficulties (for example, speech therapy, educational psychologist, or any other agencies) would be beneficial.

**Recommendation 13 – A review of the statementing process should take place with a view to the system becoming more flexible and quicker, whilst maintaining integrity. There is a need to identify children at a younger age. Consideration should be given to the development of guidelines which would enable children to be allocated places at Orrets Meadow without having to go through the full statementing process.**

Responses from schools provide evidence that access to services at Orrets Meadow is not as available as some schools would wish.

**“We need flexibility for access to provision”.**  
Panel member

One head teacher reported that:

*“The school is unable to have Orrets Meadow support this year” (due to financial pressures).*

A measure of the inflexibility within the system can be illustrated that, in July 2009, Orrets Meadow School reported that there were sixteen spare places at the school for the forthcoming September. As of the first week in October, nine spare places remained. This is not an efficient use of resources. As the recent Ofsted report for Orrets Meadow categorised the school as ‘Outstanding’, it is hard to imagine that parents would not wish to use the school. The Panel members are concerned that those resources are available to those children in greatest need and not necessarily to those families who live nearby or are able to push hardest for their child. Table 7 illustrates, by ward, the number of children living on each ward who attend Orrets Meadow.

**Table 7: Number of pupils living in each ward who attend Orrets Meadow, Historical Comparison (2007-2009)**

Number of pupils attending Orrets Meadow, By ward	2007	2008	2009
Bebington	3	3	4
Bidston and St James	5	4	3
Birkenhead and Tranmere	6	6	4
Bromborough	4	4	3
Clatterbridge	2	3	3
Cloughton	4	7	6
Eastham	6	4	3
Greasby, Frankby and Irby	1	1	1
Heswall	5	2	2
Hoylake and Meols	4	3	5
Leasowe and Moreton East	7	2	1
Liscard	0	0	1
Moreton West and Saughall Massie	2	2	5
New Brighton	1	3	2
Oxton	2	2	4
Pensby and Thingwall	1	5	2
Prenton	1	3	3
Rock Ferry	2	3	3
Seacombe	3	3	1
Upton	1	3	3
Wallasey	2	2	1
West Kirby and Thurstaston	5	4	3
Out of Borough	1	0	0

Source: Asset Management Team, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

The responses from the school’s questionnaire also highlighted a desire from a number of schools for greater access to Orrets Meadow Outreach Services. There is a perception that the ability of a child to access these services is dependent upon the address of that child and the budget of his or her school. As with all of the schools that were visited, the Panel members were extremely impressed with the work that is done at Orrets Meadow.

**Recommendation 14 – The funding arrangements for the Orrets Meadow Outreach Services should be reviewed to ensure consistent opportunity of provision to every child in need.**

**Recommendation 15 – At the next School Funding Review (2011-14), the Schools Forum should be requested to look again at the funding formula for Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, with a view to provision being based on a broader framework which includes Free School Meals.**

### 6.5.2 Speech and Language Therapy

One of the most consistent points raised throughout the review by both officers and particularly by head teachers and governors was the role of the Speech and Language Therapy Service. There was a repeated request for the service to be available in the school setting rather than in remote clinics.

**“Regarding the speech and language service, there is an issue with the liaison between the NHS and education. This results in children becoming lost in the system”.**

Head teacher

One teacher commented that:

*“Under the current referral system, including form completion, there can be delays in the child seeing a speech therapist. In addition, some parents do not take the child to the therapist”.*

Another head teacher argued that:

*“The availability of speech and language therapists in schools would be preferable. When children visit a clinic they are in a false environment where the sessions are contrived. The service would be far better if the sessions were provided in the school. In addition, a large number of appointments are not kept”.*

And another head teacher responded:

*“Many parents do not take their children to therapy. Therefore the child goes to the bottom of the queue again”*

Nevertheless, another professional commented:

*“There are limitations to what Speech and Language therapy can do for children who live in an impoverished language environment. That is more an issue of improving the home learning environment and supporting Early Years workers to improve children’s social and communication skills”.*

Whilst it is recognised that some professionals and parents do consider that there is a shortage of Speech and Language support, there is also a case that the issue is not necessarily about the number of Speech and Language therapists that there are. The key issue may involve service approach. There is currently a clinic approach with a triage. The child will be allocated to the nearest clinic to their home. As of May 2009, the number of qualified paediatric therapists was 12.89 full time equivalents, with 5.23 assistants. However their current caseload was 5,436 children aged 0-19 years. Perhaps one issue worthy of consideration is that in the context of Wirral NHS, paediatric speech & language therapy is a little service in a big organisation.

Recognition should be made that the service to specialist groups, such as the hearing impaired, special schools and those with complex needs is good. However, the service for children with lesser problems may not be delivering the benefits that education professionals would like to see. Once referred, it appears that information is not always passed on to the school. The school does not understand what is required of them. There is a need to provide a more cohesive service. However, a further issue appears to be getting the first referral at the right time. Some children appear not to have been referred early enough. The early identification of speech and language problems is important. This will include the pre-school stage. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment published by Wirral NHS in September 2008 concluded:

*“In the area of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) we appear to be under identifying the number of pupils we have across the Borough. Nationally, 12.4% of pupils have been identified. In the Wirral we have recorded much lower numbers (around 5%)”.*

The service as it is organised at the moment is not as accessible to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups as it needs to be; 'universal services' are clinic based, and require the parent/carer to 'opt in' to the service. This often results in parents who do not understand the system (who may be those with language and literacy problems themselves) not opting in, not being able to get to the clinic, having to take a child out of school for an appointment, or not perceiving that any benefit is to be gained from accessing the service for their child. As a result, there are reports of a significant number of missed appointments. The individual therapist will not be aware of the reason for non-attendance. As a comparison, a Health Visitor has continuing responsibility for their caseload and consequently will follow-up each case.

One head teacher told the panel that:

*"The problem of missed appointments could be overcome if the service came to the child".*

An officer commented that:

*"It can often be the case that the patient and family leave a clinic-based service none the wiser. What did they say?"*

The Panel members very much welcome the service review that is planned by NHS Wirral.

It would be helpful if the service review was to take the following criteria into account:

- Accessibility – How easy is it to obtain an appointment? How are children identified? How quickly are referrals managed? How easy is it to travel to an appointment? Does the system have an ethos of openness?
- Benefit – Does the therapy confer a lasting improvement in functioning? It may be the case that the therapy does not necessarily benefit those receiving it. There is currently no follow up to check for benefit as the child gets older.
- Experience – Even if the service was good, the patient / family will not come back for more if they felt that it was not a good experience.

One professional suggested that roles that could be considered by the Review may include the following:

- therapists as trainers – Therapists are relatively expensive. They could have a role in training other professionals (for example, teachers) so that they are able to recognise problems for themselves and undertake basic techniques.
- consultancy role – Therapists could be available to staff delivering universal services (for example, teachers) to be called on in a consultancy role when required. They would be able to give advice on the best way to support individual children. This may then become a formal referral to the Speech and Language Therapy service.
- specialist service – individual interventions aimed at those children who will benefit from Speech and Language Therapy.

**Recommendation 16 – The Panel welcomes the current review of the Speech and Language Therapy service and encourages greater use of therapists in training and consultancy roles.**

**Recommendation 17 – The Panel strongly supports the principle of the Speech and Language service being available either in Children's Centres or School Cluster Groups, whichever is most appropriate.**

**Recommendation 18 – Consideration should be given to joint funding (between Wirral NHS and Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council) of the specialist Children's Speech and Language Therapists. The day-to-day management of the Speech and Language Therapists should be within the Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council.**



### 6.5.3 The Gender Issue

A number of head teachers responded to the panel with the view that gender imbalance was not a consistent issue in their school. Of those, some argued that the gap is due to a maturation issue and that many boys will naturally catch up with the standard of girls by the time of 'A' Levels. An analysis of the 2008 Key Stage 2 results in Wirral show that, in English, more boys than girls achieved Level 4 (or better) in only 31 schools as opposed to girls achieving higher scores in 53 schools. A similar comparison in writing results revealed more boys than girls achieving Level 4 (or better) in only 25 schools as opposed to girls achieving higher scores in 62 schools.

**“There are a significantly higher proportion of boys who are classified as SEN. Boys tend to be lazy speakers”.**  
Head teacher

The majority of head teachers in the questionnaire sample took the view that there was a gender issue in their school and this is certainly supported by the statistical analysis based on Key Stage 2 results. Indeed, Table 8 also confirms that this is a national, as opposed to a specifically Wirral, issue. Nevertheless, based on the provisional 2009 SATs results, the gap in attainment of Level 4 in English is greater in Wirral than in many statistical or geographical neighbours.

**Table 8: Statistical Neighbours and Geographical Neighbours, Key Stage 2, English, Level 4 and above, 2009 (provisional) data, Boys and Girls comparison**

2009 provisional results	English %L4+		
	Boys	Girls	All
National	75	85	80
Wirral	78	88	83
<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>			
Bury	82	87	84
Darlington	80	88	84
Halton	76	85	80
Lancashire	77	85	81
Leeds	74	83	78
Sefton	79	88	83
St Helens	80	87	83
Stockton-on-Tees	76	86	81
Tameside	76	86	81
Telford and Wrekin	72	84	77
<b>Geographic Neighbours</b>			
Halton	76	85	80
Knowsley	74	84	79
Liverpool	74	83	78
Sefton	79	88	83
St Helens	80	87	83
Wigan	76	86	81

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

Table 9 compares, for the 2009 Key Stage 2 provisional results, the relative attainment of boys and girls both at the national level and in Wirral. The higher success rate of girls at both the national and local level is apparent.

**Table 9: Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, 2009 (provisional) data, National / Wirral comparison for Boys and Girls**

2009 provisional results		Percentage								Percentage	
		A	D	N	B	L2	L3	L4	L5	L4+	L5+
<b>Boys National</b>											
	English	1	N/A	1	5	1	17	52	23	75	23
	Reading	1	N/A	3	5	0	9	41	41	82	41
	Writing	1	N/A	1	5	0	33	46	15	60	15
<b>Girls National</b>											
	English	1	N/A	0	2	0	11	50	35	85	35
	Reading	0	N/A	2	2	0	6	36	54	89	54
	Writing	0	N/A	1	2	0	22	51	24	75	24
<b>Boys Wirral</b>											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.7	4.1	0.7	15.5	50.9	27.4	78.4	27.4
	Reading	0.7	0.1	2.4	4.1	0.0	8.4	38.9	45.4	84.3	45.4
	Writing	0.6	0.1	0.8	4.1	0.0	29.8	45.8	18.9	64.7	18.9
<b>Girls Wirral</b>											
	English	0.7	0.1	0.3	2.3	0.3	8.4	47.0	41.0	87.9	41.0
	Reading	0.6	0.1	1.3	2.3	0.0	5.0	34.2	56.5	90.7	56.5
	Writing	0.7	0.1	0.4	2.3	0.0	18.2	48.1	30.3	78.4	30.3

Source: Information Section, Children and Young People Department, Wirral Borough Council

Key to columns:	
A	pupils who were absent
D	pupils disapplied from teacher assessment
N	pupils who took the tests but failed to register a level
B	pupils who were working below the level of the test
L2-5	pupils attaining those Levels in the test
L4+	pupils attaining Level 4 or better
L5+	pupils attaining Level 5 or better

Locally, one head teacher commented:

*“There is a gender imbalance in achievement. For instance, at Foundation stage there is a real issue with boys, who, in some cases, cannot talk as they have no vocabulary. This is usually as a result of the child being part of a dysfunctional family”.*

During the school visits, however, there was significant comment received from those who access the Tranmere Rovers Study Centre. Although fully accessible to both genders, many boys, who were met during the school visits, were particularly enthusiastic about this experience. This is perhaps the type of activity that can be used to encourage boys to actively participate in literacy activities. A nationally funded project, it provides out of school study support for pupils identified by their school as requiring a boost in literacy or numeracy. It is based at Tranmere Rovers and its aim is to increase attainment in literacy and numeracy through a context of football and ICT. The support consists of 10 sessions for selected pupils on a rolling programme for Wirral primary schools. Literacy levels are identified at the beginning and end of the course, thus ensuring a basis for measuring the impact of the intervention.

A whole range of suggestions were made by head teachers with respect to ‘What can be done to improve the gender imbalance in achievement?’. The suggestions included the following:

- personalised targets and incentives for achievement.
- use of writers, poets and authors in schools.
- more use of positive male role models for boys who may not see men reading, writing, etc..
- family training to focus and engage males.
- school to deliver sessions for dads - supporting reading at home.
- more one-to-one tutoring for boys out of and within school time.
- appoint a male Teaching Assistant to work with Key Stage 1.
- adapt the curriculum to suit the gender make-up of the class.
- improved use of a creative curriculum to support different learning styles.
- continue to start with play based learning and enhance the provision.



- practical experiences for pupils to write about.
- active learning.
- small group focus.
- ensuring tasks set for writing engage boys' imagination.
- more use of drama.
- extended use of the 'Big Write' and 'Every Child a Writer'.
- more use of the 'Boys into Books' project.
- resources appropriate for boys.
- choice of books for boys.
- greater use of non-fiction texts.
- reading clubs with access to sports papers, newspapers and non-fiction.
- choice of writing materials for boys.

Interesting evidence from two different schools raised the issue of passive Year 5 / 6 girls. This was reflected in their role in class, lack of confidence and self-esteem, which resulted in a great impact on their achievements, despite strategies being employed to support them.

#### 6.5.4 Looked After Children

For some schools, Looked After Children (LAC) can be an additional usage of resources. As an example, one primary school in Wirral includes thirteen Looked After Children out of a total roll of approximately 240 pupils. While some funding (£500 per child) is received by the school, it could be argued that this amount does not meet the real needs of the child.

**“The outcomes for our Looked After Children is of great concern”.**  
Panel member

It is widely recognised that the outcomes of Looked After Children is a cause for concern. However, the Panel welcome the closer integration of the old LACES team into the Learning and Achievement branch of the Children and Young People Department. The Panel would like to encourage the authority to raise the profile of literacy specifically for Looked After Children in order to enhance their life chances. This could involve greater support for foster parents specifically to help them assist their fostered children in improving their literacy skills.

**Recommendation 19 – Among Foster Carers, Social Workers and in Residential Homes a higher priority should be given to literacy. Taking into account the Councillors’ role as a Corporate Parent, the Panel members urge that the Child’s Annual LAC (Looked After Children) Review should emphasise the importance of literacy progress.**

**Recommendation 20 – Training courses for Foster Carers and staff in Residential Homes should include a module on literacy and raising standards.**

#### 6.5.5 English as an Additional Language

There has been a rise in the number of pupils with 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) in Wirral in the last four years. It is recognised that 'English as an Additional Language' affects only a relatively small number of children in the Borough. In Wirral as a whole, it is estimated that almost one thousand pupils have English as an Additional Language. However, a number of schools report an increasing demand for this service. In particular, albeit in a small number of schools, the use of the school's resources in providing additional support for these children is significant. Indeed, one school reported that 22% of their Key Stage 2 cohort are EAL pupils.

**“The number of children with English as a Foreign Language is becoming an increasing issue in Wirral as a whole”.**  
Head teacher

In the future, perhaps more resources may need to be available in this area if the number of EAL pupils in the Borough continues to grow. A challenge for the Local Authority is to help schools to develop capacity to meet this growing demand. There is likely to be an increasing need for schools to improve staff knowledge and expertise in this area, using exponents of good practice for advice and support.

**Recommendation 21 – The Panel recognises the growing number of pupils with ‘English as an Additional Language’ (EAL). Wirral Council should enable schools to build additional capacity to further improve knowledge and expertise.**

## 6.6 Use of Resources

Funding was highlighted by all of the schools which were visited and it was also an issue that was consistently raised by those schools that completed the questionnaire. The exact comments varied as responses to questions relating to ‘Key Issues’, ‘Barriers to raising literacy attainment’, ‘Improving gender imbalance’ or requests for ‘Other support’ in the future. The Panel fully recognise that funding is a key issue for many schools. It has already been agreed by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a further scrutiny review of school funding should be held.

**“Money talks. And reads and writes too”.**  
Head teacher

This new scrutiny review will focus specifically on ‘Narrowing the Gap’ and the impact of the Deprivation Funding review, the results of which were implemented for the 2008-9 academic year. The intention is that the scrutiny review will investigate both positive and negative aspects of that Funding Review. Therefore, many of the funding issues will be covered in that review rather than this Review of Literacy Levels. However, it is fully recognised by the Panel members that the ability of a school to employ an additional teacher / Teaching Assistant or to provide additional resources can determine whether an intervention strategy can be successfully utilised in a school.

While there was much positive feedback and many complimentary comments from schools regarding the support that schools receive from the Local Authority, there were also suggestions for ways in which the service could be enhanced. Some of these have already been covered in other sections of this Report. A number of other issues are worthy of further comment at this stage.

There was generally positive feedback regarding the physical state of buildings and infrastructure. One head teacher commented:

*“The ICT facilities are a wonderful motivator for children. The school is physically now in a good state”.*

However, further use could perhaps be made of shared services and facilities, such as books and libraries or the use of professional staff, for example, speech and language therapists, in schools or Children’s Centres.

The targeted support that is available from the Local Authority to individual schools is often resulting from the School Improvement Strategy. Under the strategy, schools are categorised, enabling schools to be targeted with specific support where it is needed and, therefore, most likely to be beneficial. A possible revision of the strategy to enable more detailed categorisation aligned to the five aspects of care should provide a more accurate profile of schools and facilitate more accurate targeting of support.

With respect to the use of resources within schools, some head teachers have taken the view that, although more expensive, the use of part-time teachers is a more effective use of resources than the employment of additional Teaching Assistants. As an example, one school provides two sessions per week with a part-time teacher for the lowest banded group in each year. These sessions are offered as an alternative to assembly. This appears to be a very proactive use of resources by the school.

An officer informed the Panel that:

*“Qualified teachers need to oversee literacy development”.*

A head teacher made a similar point when remarking that:

*“There is a general concern that Teaching Assistants are put into schools as ‘an extra pair of hands’ without proper training”.*

Teaching Assistants are used to provide support for interventions in many schools. Although Teaching Assistants are clearly trained, for example, to deliver phonics teaching, the comment was made by one officer that:

*“A key to success is teacher knowledge.”*

Although the take-up of training is dependent on specific schools, access to additional training should be available if required. Although staff from Orrets Meadow already provide some training sessions, it may be that this service could be extended.

**Recommendation 22 – Greater access to refresher training for established teachers in speaking, listening and reading skills should be provided. Particular support could also be given to newly qualified Teachers and Teaching Assistants. This additional training could be provided through twilight sessions organised in School Cluster Groups.**

The point was made clearly during visits that while initiatives and interventions are largely welcomed by both schools and officers, there can sometimes be too many initiatives and some can be too short-term with funding streams that are not sustainable in the long-term. There is a danger that provision can be come too fragmented with pupils receiving too many interventions and consequently missing consistent provision. It can also be the case that ring-fenced ‘pots of money’ become available at very short notice which inhibits head teachers in using that funding in the most creative and effective manner.

One head teacher noted that:

*“New initiatives provide funding in the short-term but are not sustainable”.*

Meanwhile, an officer suggested that:

*“Initiatives can be too short-term”.*

It is equally important that the effectiveness of interventions is measured. Too often it appears that initiatives are introduced without there being adequate data provided to prove that the process is beneficial to pupils. It is essential that the Local Authority is able to gather information regarding the variety of interventions taking place in schools in order to provide guidance regarding their success. The Local Authority should aim to provide further evidence of the coordination with regard to interventions and the impact on the lowest 20%.

**Recommendation 23 – The Local Authority and schools are jointly encouraged to provide further evidence regarding the success of specific intervention techniques by greater use of objective criteria.**

Based on the evidence found during this Review, there is an on-going debate regarding the impact of class size on the literacy outcomes of pupils. One possible strategy for schools in the most deprived neighbourhoods and with the lowest Key Stage 2 results may be to try to provide class sizes in the order of fifteen as opposed to twenty-five or thirty. One option for the future could be for some of the Deprivation Funding resource to be targeted, on a pilot basis, in particular areas over a two or three year period to cover children aged between four and seven, with the Early Years children being supported by qualified teachers, as opposed to Teaching Assistants. Evidence suggests that teacher input is the most important factor in driving up attainment. One example came to light of a school whose class sizes had reduced due to a falling roll and subsequently experienced a significant improvement in results. An option could be for a pilot project to be employed to assess the impact of this strategy in Wirral.

**Recommendation 24 – Consideration should be given by the Local Authority to using the Deprivation Funding to pilot a scheme to assess the success of small class sizes in raising literacy attainment.**

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***This report was produced by the Literacy Level Scrutiny Panel.***

## Appendix 1 : Scope Document for the Literacy Levels (Key Stage 2) Scrutiny Review

Date: 27th October 2008  
 Review Title: Literacy Levels at Key Stage 2

<b>Scrutiny Panel Chair:</b> Cllr Sheila Clarke	Contact details: 0151 608 1154
<b>Scrutiny Officer:</b> Alan Veitch	Contact details: 0151 691 8564
<b>Departmental Link Officer:</b> Marie Lawrence	Contact details: 0151 666 4335
<b>Panel members:</b> Cllr Sheila Clarke Cllr Frank Doyle Cllr Tony Smith	0151 608 1154 0151 652 9488 0151 677 1384
<b>Other Key Officer contacts:</b>	
<p><b>1. Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?</b></p> <p>1.1 To raise the aspirations of young people                  —Raise overall educational attainment, particularly lower achieving young people.</p>	
<p><b>2. What are the main issues?</b></p> <p>2.1 The review will include both reading and writing.                  2.2 Why are levels of achievement so much lower in writing than in reading?                  2.3 Why are there a number of primary schools below the national average for % of children reaching Level 4 for reading at Key Stage 2?                  2.4 Why are there a larger number of primary schools below the national average for % of children reaching Level 4 for writing at Key Stage 2?                  2.5 What interventions are in place in schools where a significant number of children do not reach Level 4?                  2.6 What interventions are in place in schools where only one or two children do not normally reach Level 4?                  2.7 Are schools satisfied with the support that is available?                  2.8 Is there a gender issue regarding attainment levels?                  2.9 How do deprivation levels affect the attainment levels of children?</p>	
<p><b>3. The Committee's overall aim/objective in doing this work is:</b></p> <p>3.1 To ensure that as many children as possible leave primary school with adequate reading and writing skills.</p>	
<p><b>4. The possible outputs/outcomes are:</b></p> <p>4.1 Better understanding by members of the issues relating to literacy levels at Key Stage 2.                  4.2 Agreement that adequate interventions are available and are used by schools.                  4.3 Determination that underachieving individuals and groups have access to the appropriate support.                  4.4 Confirmation that the Council achieves value for money from the current intervention plans.</p>	
<p><b>5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?</b></p> <p>5.1 To recommend any changes which would lead to the outcomes listed in section 4 above.                  5.2 To raise the overall standards of literacy in primary schools.</p>	

<p><b>6. Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?</b></p> <p>6.1 Cabinet.</p> <p>6.2 Other councillors.</p> <p>6.3 Primary school head teachers / governors.</p>													
<p><b>7. Duration of enquiry?</b></p> <p>Final report to be submitted to Children Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the current municipal year (that is, by 16th March 2009).</p>													
<p><b>8. What category does the review fall into?</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Policy Review</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="width: 50%;">Policy Development</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>External Partnership</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Performance Management</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holding Executive to Account</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		Policy Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	External Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Performance Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	Holding Executive to Account	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Policy Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy Development	<input type="checkbox"/>										
External Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Performance Management	<input type="checkbox"/>										
Holding Executive to Account	<input type="checkbox"/>												
<p><b>9. Extra resources needed? Would the investigation benefit from the co-operation of an expert witness?</b></p> <p>The Review will be conducted by councillors with the support of existing officers. However, the Panel are looking for advice from people with expertise on this topic.</p>													
<p><b>10. What information do we need?</b></p> <p><b>10.1 Secondary information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc).</b></p> <p>10.1.1 Need KS2 SATS results for 2003-8 for each primary school (reading and writing) in order to track where improvements have occurred.</p> <p>10.1.2 Ofsted reports - How do other councils compare?</p> <p>10.1.3 Comparative information with the national average and with Statistical Neighbours</p> <p>10.1.4 Relevant reports into literacy issues</p> <p>10.1.5 Previous Committee / Cabinet reports regarding literacy levels / strategies</p> <p>10.1.6 Scrutiny reports from other councils into similar issues.</p>	<p><b>10.2 Primary/new evidence/information</b></p> <p>10.2.1 Briefing paper to cover the major issues</p> <p>10.2.2 Interviews with key officers</p> <p>10.2.3 Interviews with head teachers, teachers, governors at selected schools</p> <p>10.2.4 Feedback from parent governors.</p> <p>10.2.5 Feedback from school councils.</p>												
<p><b>10.3 Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc). Council officers to include:</b></p> <p>Marie Lawrence, Early Years &amp; Primary Education Strategic Service Manager, WBC.</p> <p>Bridie Sharkey, Principal Manager for English 0 - 19, WBC.</p> <p>Jenny Richmond, English consultant for Key Stages 1 and 2, WBC.</p> <p>Catherine Kerr, Principal Manager for Early Years, WBC.</p> <p>Pauline Cunningham, Communications Language &amp; Literacy Development for</p>	<p><b>10.4 What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?</b></p> <p>10.4.1 What lessons can be learned from the many examples of good practice that already exist? Does the authority have the processes in place to facilitate the spread of good practice?</p> <p>10.4.2 What intervention packages are available to schools?</p> <p>10.4.3 What else can be done to help improve literacy levels in primary schools?</p>												

<p>Early Years, WBC.</p> <p>Bev Greathead, Head teacher / Coordinator of the Poulton Lancelyn Writing Network (initially a written report)</p> <p>Deirdre Smith, Principal Manager, Study Support, WBC (possible) Sarah Howarth, Lifelong Learning Advisor (+ Family Literacy project), WBC (possible)</p> <p>Statistical Neighbours</p> <p>Head teachers / governors of four selected primary schools</p>	
<p><b>11. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visits / observations, face-to face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, etc)</b></p> <p>11.1 Individual meetings with key officers listed in 10.3 above.</p> <p>11.2 Visits to a number of primary schools (head teacher, teachers, governors).</p> <p>11.3 Desk research.</p>	
<p><b>12. In what ways can we involve the public and at what stages? (consider whole range of consultative mechanisms, local committees and local ward mechanisms).</b></p> <p>12.1 School councils will be invited to comment</p> <p>12.2 Parent governors will be included in the review</p> <p>12.3 There is no plan to involve public meetings or Area Forum meetings.</p>	

**Appendix 2 : Questionnaire Issued to Schools**

**EVIDENCE FROM HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS**

<b>Name of Head teacher</b>
<b>Name of school</b>
<b>What are the key issues affecting literacy attainment in your school?</b>
<b>What are the barriers to raising literacy levels at your school?</b>
<b>What interventions are in place in your school?</b>
<b>What can be done to improve the gender imbalance in achievement?</b>
<b>What are the strengths of the support that you receive from the Local Authority?</b>

**What other support would you like for the challenges that face your school?**

**Have you any suggestions that would help to further improve literacy levels?**

**Any other comments**

Many thanks for completing this form. The Panel members very much appreciate your input.



### **Appendix 3 : Reference list of Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1** – The evidence gathered shows that successful interventions in the Early Years do impact on literacy skills. A Children and Young People Departmental Review should be carried out to ensure that easy access and an appropriate offer of service is provided in all Children’s Centres.

**Recommendation 2** – In order to ensure that more families engage with Children’s Centres, information available through websites should be improved and be timely. There should be better promotion of specific activities, including pre-reading programmes, available at each Centre. Publicity could also be improved through a variety of outlets such as GP surgeries, local organisations and community groups.

**Recommendation 3** – Health Visitors are a key contact for many families with young children. Wirral NHS and Wirral Borough Council are encouraged to enhance the role of Health Visitors in providing early identification of ‘hard to reach’ families and subsequent signposting to other services, particularly in Children’s Centres. The delivery of the ‘Healthy Child Programme’ in Wirral provides an opportunity for agencies to work together.

**Recommendation 4** – Professional barriers need to be broken down. Multi-agency services should be provided via Children’s Centres, for example, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Dental Service, Speech and Language Therapists, School Nurse, Hearing and Sight Specialists, Paediatricians, Early Years Specialists, and so on.

**Recommendation 5** – The Local Authority should provide guidance and support to schools who would like to encourage greater involvement of parents, businesses and older people in providing one-to-one reading support in schools. In return, schools are encouraged to participate in the scheme.

**Recommendation 6** – The Local Authority is encouraged to build on the moderation work that has already been carried out at the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. This consistent approach should also be applied to the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Schools are encouraged to work with each other and with the Local Authority to deliver the consistent approach.

**Recommendation 7** – The Local Authority should evaluate the success of the Communications, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) programme and plan ahead to embed good practice in schools currently involved in the programme and promote that good practice to other schools.

**Recommendation 8** – The Local Authority is encouraged to provide further in-school training in phonological awareness and schools are encouraged to fully participate in the training opportunities.

**Recommendation 9** – Extended Services should be encouraged to give a higher priority to literacy-based activities.

**Recommendation 10** – The impact of the Family Learning Service is welcomed. With the forthcoming changes to Learning Skills Council arrangements, the Local Authority should consider how the service could be made more universally available.

**Recommendation 11** – Greater emphasis should be given to the provision of a consistent link between schools and Children’s Social Care Services. A Social Worker should be allocated to either a Children’s Centre or a School Cluster Group, wherever is most appropriate.

**Recommendation 12** – The Council is encouraged to promote more multi-agency working, specifically by improving protocols for the sharing of information between health, social care and education professionals. This should apply particularly to ‘hard to reach’ families.

**Recommendation 13** – A review of the statementing process should take place with a view to the system becoming more flexible and quicker, whilst maintaining integrity. There is a need to identify children at a younger age. Consideration should be given to the development of guidelines which would enable children to be allocated places at Orrets Meadow without having to go through the full statementing process.

**Recommendation 14** – The funding arrangements for the Orrets Meadow Outreach Services should be reviewed to ensure consistent opportunity of provision to every child in need.

**Recommendation 15** – At the next School Funding Review (2011-14), the Schools Forum should be requested to look again at the funding formula for Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, with a view to provision being based on a broader framework which includes Free School Meals.

**Recommendation 16** – The Panel welcomes the current review of the Speech and Language Therapy service and encourages greater use of therapists in training and consultancy roles.

**Recommendation 17** – The Panel strongly supports the principle of the Speech and Language service being available either in Children’s Centres or School Cluster Groups, whichever is most appropriate.

**Recommendation 18** – Consideration should be given to joint funding (between Wirral NHS and Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council) of the specialist Children’s Speech and Language Therapists. The day-to-day management of the Speech and Language Therapists should be within the Children and Young People Department of Wirral Borough Council.

**Recommendation 19** – Among Foster Carers, Social Workers and in Residential Homes a higher priority should be given to literacy. Taking into account the Councillors’ role as a Corporate Parent, the Panel members urge that the Child’s Annual LAC (Looked After Children) review should emphasise the importance of literacy progress.

**Recommendation 20** – Training courses for Foster Carers and staff in Residential Homes should include a module on literacy and raising standards.

**Recommendation 21** – The Panel recognises the growing number of pupils with ‘English as an Additional Language’ (EAL). Wirral Council should enable schools to build additional capacity to further improve knowledge and expertise.

**Recommendation 22** – Greater access to refresher training for established teachers in speaking, listening and reading skills should be provided. Particular support could also be given to newly qualified teachers and Teaching Assistants. This additional training could be provided through twilight sessions organised in School Cluster Groups.

**Recommendation 23** – The Local Authority and schools are jointly encouraged to provide further evidence regarding the success of specific Intervention techniques by greater use of objective criteria.

**Recommendation 24** – Consideration should be given by the Local Authority to using the Deprivation Funding to pilot a scheme to assess the success of small class sizes in raising literacy attainment.

## Appendix 4 : List of Tables

Table	Description	Section	Page
1	Statistical Neighbours and Geographical Neighbours, Key Stage 2, English, Level 4 and above.	6.1	11
2	Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, 2009 (provisional) data, National and Wirral comparison	6.1	12
3	Numbers of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, 2008 and 2009 (provisional) data	6.1	13
4	Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, Wirral, Historical comparison (2004-2009)	6.1	13
5	Percentage of pupils achieving below Level 3, Key Stage 2, English, Historical Comparison (2004-2009), England and Wirral comparison	6.1	14
6	Comparison of pupils receiving Free School Meals and pupils achieving Level 4 or above, Key Stage 2, English, 2009 (provisional) data, by District and Area in Wirral	6.4	21
7	Number of pupils living in each ward who attend Orrets Meadow, Historical Comparison (2007-2009)	6.5.1	24
8	Statistical Neighbours and Geographical Neighbours, Key Stage 2, English, Level 4 and above, 2009 (provisional) data, Boys and Girls comparison	6.5.3	27
9	Percentage of pupils achieving each Level, Key Stage 2, English, Reading and Writing, 2009 (provisional) data, National / Wirral comparison for Boys and Girls	6.5.3	28

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