

Joint School Improvement Strategy

July 2020

Executive Summary

Purpose

The North of Tyne Devolution Deal calls for a unified approach to school improvement. Building on discussions in the Sub-Regional Improvement Board and engagement with school leaders, the North of Tyne Combined Authority began work on a Joint School Improvement Strategy in 2018 and Cabinet have since agreed a set of priorities to frame the strategy. This document is the resulting strategy and is presented for Cabinet's consideration.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Joint School Improvement Strategy represents a unified approach to school improvement across the constituent North of Tyne authorities. It identifies how our education teams will collaborate to add value, contributing to improved performance against five key priorities, considering national and local best practice. Our collective impact will raise the standard of education and improve life chances for the young people we serve.

What are we trying to improve?

Not enough of our children enter the North of Tyne education system ready for school, with early reading highlighted as one of our biggest areas of concern. This contributes to a long-term negative impact on academic outcomes, particularly for white British boys from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are also concerned about the mental health of our pupils, highlighted by a rising number of Education, Health and Care Plans accountable to Social, Emotional & Mental Health issues. We expect this situation to have been exacerbated by the impacts of Covid-19.

Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 has historically been and continues to be a significant problem. At the end of Key Stage 4, 4000 of our young people do not achieve a 'strong' 9-5 pass in English and Maths GCSEs. Our exclusions North of Tyne are higher than the national average, both for fixed-term and permanent exclusions.

The achievement gap (the difference in attainment between pupils from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds) is one of the biggest challenges in the North of Tyne education system. Evidence suggests this problem will be compounded due to Covid-19 school disruption. In the North of Tyne secondary phase, pupils receiving the Pupil Premium for deprivation are more likely to receive a Fixed Term Exclusion than their peers. Similarly, pupils from the 20% and 40% most deprived areas are more likely to receive a Fixed Term Exclusion than pupils from other areas.

On leaving school, too many of our young people are Not in Education, Employment or Training. We expect this to get worse owing to the impact of Covid-19 – we have already seen a sharp decline in apprenticeship uptake among our 16-18-year olds. We also face an

employability skills gap across the North of Tyne, which needs to be addressed before our young people leave school.

Evidence tells us that quality teaching has the most positive impact on pupil outcomes, particularly for those from a disadvantaged background. It is therefore of concern that we have a notable gap in Physics, Maths and Computing specialist teachers, and a problem retaining new entrants to the profession. At the moment, 92% of our Primary schools and only 68% of our Secondary schools are graded as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Our leadership development training needs to better reflect the current challenges of school leadership (including how to lead through a crisis), in order to raising existing standards and prepare a strong pipeline of tomorrow’s school leaders.

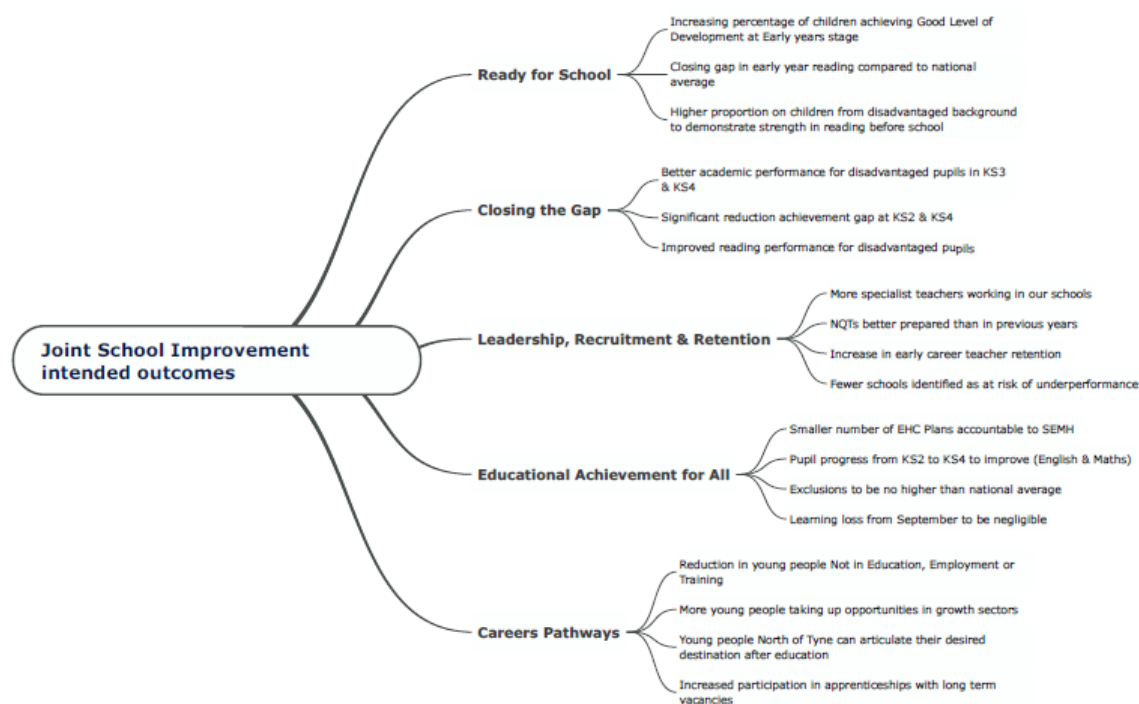
Our approach

We intend to work together as a combined authority, adding value to the efforts of our three constituent authorities by collaborating to raise standards against our five shared priorities. We will share best practice across North of Tyne schools, academies, colleges and specialist provision. We will build on the strong partnerships that already exist and will share our learning with the wider sector. We will use rigorous evaluation processes to ensure that our research, learning and impact are robustly tested.

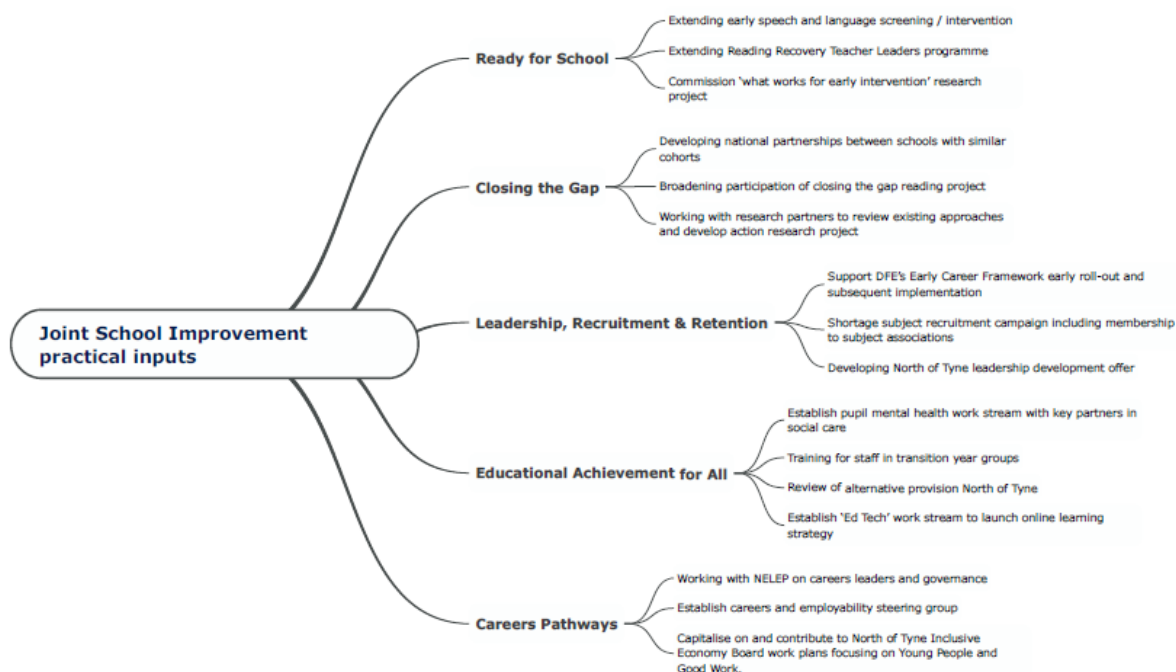
This strategy outlines what the system needs, some approaches are about identifying opportunities to share current best practice and extend successful interventions, some will require extra funding.

This strategy is a companion to an ambitious North of Tyne Education Challenge. The Challenge will impact positively upon all priorities outlined here, supporting the work with additional, related interventions.

The practical inputs we intend to focus on:



Our intended outcomes:



What will success look like?

Most children will arrive into our school system ready for school. Pupils in the Early Years show confidence and competence in reading, regardless of their background. Pupils in our schools demonstrate strong mental health, with a reducing number of EHCPs stating SEMH as a contributory factor.

We have addressed the historical issue of transition and pupils progress between Key Stages, particularly key stage 2 to key stage 4, with increased success. Our fixed term and long-term exclusions show a long-term downward trend, demonstrating a truly inclusive education system.

The difference in attainment between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers has reduced at Key Stage 4. Our work in Early Years and at transition points has contributed towards the long-term reduction in the attainment gap. Our young people clearly understand the skills and qualifications they need for a successful life after school. The very large majority of our young people are in education, employment or training.

We have a thriving community of specialist teachers and school leaders ready to successfully teach our children, to develop our school workforce and to lead our schools. The number of schools graded as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted has increased and is now higher than that seen nationally. Where a school is not yet Good or Outstanding, the local authority is confident that the leadership of the school is bringing about rapid improvement. Our strategies and research are nationally recognised and reflect the outstanding education practice that exists across our region.

North of Tyne Joint School Improvement Strategy

Background

The North of Tyne Devolution Deal calls for a unified approach to school improvement in the form of a Joint School Improvement Strategy.

The constituent local authorities of the NTCA will work together to explore the scope for developing a unified approach to school improvement for the schools they maintain, initially through the preparation of a Joint School Improvement Strategy that would significantly assist in identifying constituent strengths and weaknesses, and support efforts to work together to learn from and replicate good practice as appropriate.

Building on discussions in the Sub-Regional Improvement Board and engagement with school leaders, the North of Tyne Combined Authority began work on a Joint School Improvement Strategy in 2018. At its meeting on 24th April 2019 Cabinet agreed shared priorities for that strategy. They are

- Ready for School
- Educational Achievement for All
- Closing the Gap
- Careers Pathways; and
- Leadership, Recruitment and Retention.

Scope

This document outlines a strategy for school improvement through constituent North of Tyne authorities working together, with a focus on the Combined Authority adding value under each of the agreed priorities. Officers of the constituent authorities have sought to identify specific issues underlying each priority and have identified local and national best practice interventions.

Progress will be cumulative; the nature of a joint improvement strategy means that outcomes will only be achieved as part of a wider programme of work in each constituent authority. The impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated many of the issues we had originally sought to address. The Children's Commissioner has stated that a worrying number of children are likely to miss six months or more of education as a result of the coronavirus crisis. This presents us with the imperative to work together and improve learning opportunities for children now.

None of the approaches identified here are 'quick fixes', and we acknowledge uncertainty about the practicalities of school operations in September 2020. This strategy outlines what the system needs, some approaches are about identifying opportunities to share current best practice and extend successful interventions, some will require extra funding.

This is a collaborative strategy, with the lead education officer from each of our local authorities representing the considerations of their wider team. The vision, scale of ambition and priority areas have been tested with a wide range of stakeholders. A series of engagement events have been held since April 2018, with views gathered from headteachers, teachers, health and social care leaders, businesses, government representatives, and sector experts. National and local education system leaders and organisations have been engaged and we hope to further test our strategy through a NTCA Education Stakeholder Group

This strategy is a companion to an ambitious North of Tyne Education Challenge. The Challenge will impact positively upon all priorities outlined here, supporting the work with additional, related interventions.

Vision

We have the highest expectations for all our children and young people. We believe that all children and young people have the right to the very best education, and the very best personal support advice and guidance. We want all children and young people to reach their potential and have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to lead fulfilling lives.

We intend to work together as a combined authority, adding value to the efforts of our three constituent authorities by collaborating to raise standards against our five shared priorities. We will champion excellence and share best practice across North of Tyne schools, academies, colleges and specialist provision. We will build on the strong partnerships that already exist, capitalising upon the skills and resources of diocesan partners, universities, business partners, research school partners, teaching school alliances, school networks, trusts, teaching and leadership unions and the Local Enterprise Partnership in addition to national research groups, CPD providers and thought-leaders. We are committed to sharing our learning from this work with the wider sector at a national level. We will use rigorous evaluation processes to ensure that our research, learning and impact are robustly tested.

1. Ready for school

We want all children to be ready for school, so they can excel in our education system.

At the moment, 72% of North of Tyne pupils reach a Good Level of Development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, meaning around 2,400 children North of Tyne are not achieving a Good Level of Development. These children and their families are a key focus for us.

Granular data shows that there is an opportunity for us to improve early reading attainment across all pupil groups with focus on our most disadvantaged children. This will have significant positive impact later in their educational life.

Our approach here is to focus on early reading, improve screening and early intervention across the piece, and support parents and pupils through the EYFS.

The region is already working towards tackling these issues. We will share learning from existing work across all constituent authorities, including a '1001 days' project focusing on extra support for families and young children most in need, an EYFS 'Passport' to capture key milestones in preparation for a child's transition into school and a strong reading recovery programme. The practical things we want to focus on include:

- Capitalising upon economies of scale and seeking funding to extend early speech and language screening and subsequent intervention.
- Extending a Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders programme to train colleagues across North of Tyne.
- Work with local and national research partners to commission 'what works for early intervention' research project.

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- Increasing the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Closing the current gap in early years reading (the literacy strand of GLD) in comparison to national average.
- Seeing a higher proportion of children from a disadvantaged background demonstrate strength in reading before starting school.

2. Educational achievement for all

Pupil mental health underpins successful academic achievement and the overall life experience of the pupils we serve. It is therefore a key focus of this strategy. Recognising our biggest challenges outside of mental health, we must place emphasis upon points of transition in our education system and our relatively high exclusion rate.

Before Covid-19, we saw an increase in EHC Plans, approximately quarter of which are accountable to SEMH. Initial indications suggest an understandable spike in mental health problems for children and young people attributable to the pandemic. We expect to see this borne out through experiences and academic performance at school.

Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 has historically been a key issue for our school system in constituent authorities. This means that at the end of Key Stage 4, over 4000 of our young people do not achieve a 'strong' 9-5 pass in English and Maths GCSEs.

Across the North of Tyne, A-Level and Academic average points are in line with National and North East regional averages (North of Tyne is 32.87 for A level and 32.95 for all Academic qualifications). Average points for Tech levels are similarly in line with National and regional performance, however average points for Applied General qualifications, whilst in line with national are slightly below the regional average.

Overall Absence and Persistent Absence in the North of Tyne area are worse than national average in the secondary phase and special school setting.

Our exclusions North of Tyne are higher than the national average, both for fixed-term and permanent exclusions. We are committed to continuing to work on this issue, understanding that we cannot enable achievement for all if we have large numbers of pupils excluded from our education system.

It is uncertain what school will look like in the coming academic year and we need to be prepared for some of the children we serve being at home for some of their learning. We need a more structured online learning provision than what we currently have available.

Our approach therefore is to focus on pupil mental health provision, transition points and exclusions. We also intend to develop an evidence-based approach to online learning.

We will share learning from existing work from constituent authorities including participation in a national mental health Trailblazer project, student counsellors in collaboration with universities, successful middle school models, and effective approaches to reducing unnecessary exclusions. The practical things we want to focus on include:

- Establish pupil mental health workstream with key partners in health and social care (e.g. Early Help)
- Training for staff in transition year groups to enable them to prepare pupils for next steps; including independent learning and life skills.
- Review of alternative provision across North of Tyne, with recommendations about how best to move forward collectively.
- Establish a North of Tyne 'EdTech' workstream to launch an online learning strategy.

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- A smaller number of EHC Plans accountable to SEMH and a reducing trend of learners at ET Support.
- Pupil progress data between KS2 and 3, and KS3 and 4 to improve in English and Maths.
- Fixed and permanent exclusions to be no higher than the national average.
- Learning loss due to home/remote learning from the beginning of the academic year to be negligible.

3. Closing the gap

The achievement gap (the difference in attainment between pupils from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds) is one of the biggest challenges in our post-Covid-19 education system.

At Foundation Stage, the achievement gap is smaller North of Tyne than the national average. This changes at KS2, becoming larger than the national average. By KS4, we have a significantly larger achievement gap than the national average.

In the secondary phase, pupils receiving the Pupil Premium for deprivation are more likely to receive a Fixed Term Exclusion than their peers. Similarly, pupils from the 20% and 40% most deprived areas are significantly more likely to receive a Fixed Term Exclusion than pupils from other less deprived areas.

Granular evidence suggests a gap in reading attainment, particularly for white British boys from a disadvantaged background which ultimately has a long-term effect on their academic outcomes.

To work towards reducing this gap and offer a fair chance for all North of Tyne children, our approach is to focus on identifying what works nationally, reducing the gap in reading achievement and having a focus on inclusion training.

We will amplify existing promising practice evident in many schools across constituent authorities and share learning from an ambitious place-based change pilot. The practical things we want to focus on include:

- Developing partnerships between schools with significant achievement gap and those who have demonstrated success with similar very similar pupil cohorts (nationally).
- Building upon and broadening participation of existing 'closing the reading gap' project.
- Work with local and national research partners to review existing approaches to 'closing the gap' and develop an action research project.

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- Better academic performance for disadvantaged pupils in KS3 and 4

- Indicative data to show significant reduction of achievement gap at KS2.
- Indicative data to show significant reduction of achievement gap at KS4.
- Increased attainment in reading for specific cohorts of disadvantaged pupils.

4. Careers pathways

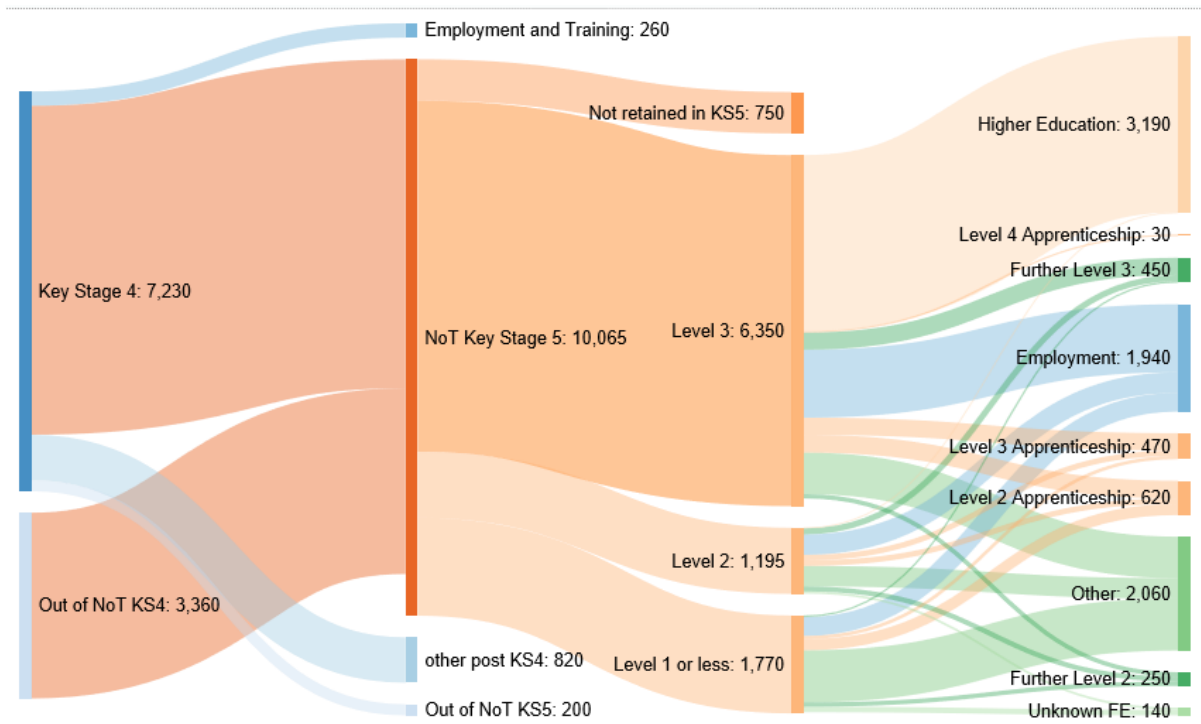
Too many of our young people in the North of Tyne are not in Education, Employment or Training. We are facing a significant employability skills gap, which needs to be addressed before our young people leave school.

840 of our 16-17 year olds last year were considered Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Worryingly, local data suggests at least a 5% increase in young people NEET in the coming year as a result of disruption to education services and placements.

Some of our young people were in employment with training that does not lead to a regulated qualification, which does not therefore meet the ‘duty to participate’.

Apprenticeship start rates in the North of Tyne area are relatively low (especially for the 19-24-year-old age band). The overall apprenticeships start rate for under-19s in North of Tyne is 7.3%, which is lower than the North East regional average. Apprenticeships have seen a sharp decline in uptake in the North of Tyne as a result of Covid-19, with the greatest reduction in participation coming from the 16-18 age bracket.

We have an employability skills gap. 26% of the vacancies in North of Tyne were skills shortage vacancies. 54% of these for high skills roles and 19% for service intensive roles (such as carers and sales staff).



The above diagram shows the 2014-15 KS4 cohort, their activities mapped to the following KS5 cohort (finishing in 2017) and their activities mapped to 2018 destination.

As part of North of Tyne Economic Recovery efforts, much work is underway to mitigate unemployment among school leavers, including working alongside Government to make a difference locally. In addition to supporting these efforts, our approach will be to work with North of Tyne businesses, ensuring careers education is aligned to key sector opportunities – preparing our young people with relevant skills to thrive in these roles. This will dovetail with our wider NTCA inclusive economic vision and capitalise upon employer engagement to raise aspirations, through some of our highest profile North of Tyne assets (including NHS partners who have committed to recruiting from cohorts where we know career pathways are difficult). The practical things we want to focus on include:

- Working in partnership with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership to amplify good practice including work with careers leaders and governance.
- Establish a careers and employability steering group, bringing together in-school practitioners, North of Tyne key sector businesses, and skills and careers education providers.
- Capitalise upon and contribute to North of Tyne Inclusive Economy Board work plans focusing on ‘young people’ and ‘good work’.

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- Reduction in young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in North of Tyne
- Ensuring more young people leave school able to take up opportunities in key North of Tyne growth sectors.
- Pupil, parent, teacher and employer voice indicating that young people can articulate their desired destination after education.
- Increase participation in Apprenticeships in sectors with long term job vacancies.

5. Leadership, recruitment and retention

We recognise that teachers have the biggest impact upon pupil outcomes, even more so for those from a disadvantage background. We are driven to ensure we have a specialist, motivated teaching workforce. We have a strong commitment to leadership development and succession planning, so all schools can secure high quality and sustained leadership.

Regional data shows we’re overproducing specialist teachers for Primary, Biology, English and History. Following a national trend, we have around a 30% gap for Maths and Computing teachers and more than a 50% gap for Physics teachers. In keeping with the national trend, we have an issue with retention of early career teachers (practitioners in the first three years of their career).

Regional insight tells us that our existing leadership development programmes have proven strengths but could benefit from further development. We see a need to incorporate elements of training to address the current challenges of school leadership (including how to lead through a crisis).

We have 343 schools in the North of Tyne combined authority. There are 249 Primary schools – of which 92% are currently graded as Good or Outstanding, 63 Secondary – of which 68% are Good or Outstanding and 22 Special – of which 90% are Good or Outstanding.

Our approach will be to address the specialist teacher shortage, better support our early career teachers and better develop our existing and future school leaders to help raise standards.

We are already working with the DfE, supporting the Opportunity North East programme to ensure as many of our schools are engaged in the early roll-out of the Early Careers Framework as possible. We have established good partnerships with all ECF providers, cascaded key information and hosted a webinar for schools in lieu of a face-to-face DfE event. We will capture and share the best of the existing leadership development programmes across constituent authorities and build upon work with the Great North East Maths Hub and the Science Learning Partnership. The practical things we want to focus on include:

- Continued support for uptake of DfE Opportunity North East’s Early Career Framework and sharing the best practice from early roll-out.
- Shortage subject recruitment campaign including membership to subject associations for new Computing, Maths and Physics teachers.
- Developing a North of Tyne leadership development offer, incorporating the best local and national development programmes.

The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- More shortage-subject specialist teachers working in NTCA schools.
- Mentor voice to show that NQTs are better-prepared than in previous years.
- Increase in early career teacher retention (2023/24)
- Fewer schools identified as at risk of underperformance.

Additional North of Tyne Combined Authority projects

Existing and future NTCA projects running alongside this strategy will support our work. For example: an ongoing STEM and Digital Skills Programme (delivered through various partners including Sunderland Software City, NUSTEM at Northumbria University, Woodhorn Museum, Centre for Life and Kielder Observatory) supports the Education Achievement for All priority; an ambitious NU Futures project delivered through the Newcastle United Foundation will contribute to our Closing the Gap and Careers Pathways priorities; and the NTCA Digital Inclusion project has set aside funding for provision of learning equipment to a number of digitally excluded school-age children, which will support our Closing the Gap priority.

Evaluation and Governance

As we move from strategy into early delivery, it is important to get our governance right. Acknowledging existing accountability measures from the Department for Education, Regional Schools Commissioner, Ofsted and individual Local Authorities, in our report to Cabinet on 24th April 2019 we proposed Governance in five parts:

- The existing Devolution Deal 5 Year Gateway Process;
- The Mayor, Portfolio Holder and Cabinet of the North of Tyne Combined Authority;
- A Stakeholder group to provide input and assurance;
- The Overview and Scrutiny committee;
- An advisory North of Tyne Education Improvement Board (as presented to Head of Paid Service in Education Portfolio Update on 28th April 2020)

Each priority presented in this strategy be reviewed by NTCA Education Improvement Board in the summer term, with opportunity to challenge, test and contribute to the current strategy in the preceding terms. The NTCA Education Strategy Group will monitor progress every half-term, presenting findings to (and encouraging feedback from) the wider NTCA Education Stakeholder Group every term.

NTCA Education Improvement Board

The primary role of an Education Improvement Board will be to play an advisory role to the NTCA Cabinet and challenge, test and contribute to the current strategy and its delivery as presented by the Education ADs and Strategic Lead for Education. On advice from Regional Schools Commissioners office, this group is a reworking of the existing Sub-Regional School Improvement Board. This board will meet on a termly basis, in line with the cycle of school activity.

NTCA Education Strategy Group

This is a regular opportunity for the ADs from each constituent LA, Strategic Lead for Education Challenge at NTCA and the Head of North East Regional Delivery from the DfE to meet and develop the Joint School Improvement Strategy and Education Challenge.

NTCA Education Stakeholder Group

This group allows for contributions from a wide range of local and national education expertise, ensuring our thinking is robust and representative of the sector.