

7 June 2016

Chris Russell
Regional Director
East Midlands

Dear Sir or Madam

Concerns about the quality of education in Northamptonshire

I am writing to express my concern about the quality of education in Northamptonshire.

Across Northamptonshire there are too many early years providers and schools of all types and phases that are not good enough. As a result, children do not achieve as well as they should. This applies particularly to disadvantaged children in the county, who are underachieving as a group. There needs to be greater oversight and coordinated action from those accountable for educational provision in the county.

In the early years, too few children achieve well across the prime areas of learning. Although learning outcomes have started to improve, not enough children are making the progress that they need to make in order to be ready for primary school.

At primary level, just under a quarter of pupils in Northamptonshire attend a school that is less than good compared with 15% nationally. This relatively poor performance is reflected in pupil outcomes:

- In the phonics screening check, children in the county have been under the national standard for the last three years. Three per cent fewer disadvantaged children in Northamptonshire reached the national standard than disadvantaged children nationally.
- At key stage 1, 74% of children in Northamptonshire reached level 2 writing compared with 77% nationally. In reading, two per cent fewer pupils than nationally reached level 2. Pupils eligible for free school meals were further behind their more advantaged classmates than nationally.
- At key stage 2, pupils perform particularly poorly in mathematics and in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling, test. Only 73% of pupils in the county achieved a level 4b in mathematics compared with 77% nationally. In the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test, only 70% of pupils in the county achieved a level 4b compared with 73% nationally.
- At age 11, only 59% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieved the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics last year compared with 66% of pupils eligible for free school meals nationally.

I am particularly concerned that at primary level, higher-ability pupils are not being supported to achieve as well as they should. Inspectors report that teachers are not making sure that the most able pupils are sufficiently challenged and that, as a result, they are not making sufficient progress.

At secondary level, more than a third of the county's pupils attend a school that is less than good compared with 21% nationally. Again, this is reflected in outcomes for pupils:

- By the end of key stage 4, Northamptonshire pupils are behind their peers across the country, with only 52% achieving five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics compared with 57% nationally in 2015.
- The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is particularly stark at key stage 4. Only 27% of young people eligible for free school meals in Northamptonshire achieved five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics last year.
- The poor success rates for individual GCSE subject areas, particularly in science and modern foreign languages, are also a concern. Only 61% of pupils achieved a good (defined as A* to C) science GCSE compared with 69% nationally. Only 62% of Northamptonshire pupils achieved a good modern foreign language GCSE compared with 70% nationally.

Almost all the secondary schools and many primary schools in the county are academies. Therefore, as well as writing to the local authority, I am also writing to a number of multi-academy trusts and to the regional schools commissioner to highlight this systemic underperformance.

The distribution list also includes local politicians and Members of Parliament, as strong political will is going to be needed to bring about the concerted action required by all those working in the sector. I urge you all to engage in this endeavour by challenging and supporting each other to do better for the county's children.

Ofsted will, of course, continue to monitor performance across the county and will ensure that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, is kept informed of developments.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Russell".

**Chris Russell HMI
Regional Director
East Midlands**

Recipients:

Local Members of Parliament
Council Leaders (Education)
Chief executives of local authorities
Interim Director of children's services
Regional schools commissioner
Directors of education for the Anglican diocese
Directors of education for the Roman Catholic diocese
Chief executive officers of multi-academy trusts
Principals of further education colleges and sixth form colleges
Initial teacher training partnerships serving the area
Teaching school alliances

cc. Department for Education