

<i>COMMITTEE</i>	Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<i>DATE</i>	Wednesday 12 October 2005
<i>TITLE OF REPORT</i>	Medway Excellence Cluster
<i>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</i>	Kath Chesterman, Medway Excellence Cluster and Behaviour Improvement Programme Manager

1 Purpose of the item

- 1.1 To provide members with information on the Medway Excellence Cluster Partnership (MECP) to facilitate a discussion on their work.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to provide views on the various strands of the Excellence Cluster.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Medway Excellence Cluster was born on the 10 January 2005 as part of a nationwide series of Excellence Clusters. The funding ceases in January 2008. The Cluster follows directly from The North Gillingham Education Action Zone (Gillingham Partnership) and contains the 16 schools from the consortium plus an additional five local schools. The main aims of the Cluster are set out in the appended MECP Action Plan (Appendix 1) and are based around equipping schools, students and parents to succeed.
- 3.2 The MECP is managed by a Partnership Management Board comprising all partner school headteachers, LEA senior staff and other partners by invitation. The rules of the DfES, who directly fund the Excellence Cluster, state that there will be no involvement of elected members in the governing Partnership Board. MECP staff are employed by the LEA on rolling three year fixed term contracts. The MECP Manager and other staff are accountable to the Partnership Board. Strand programme staff such as Learning Mentors are based in the Excellence Cluster schools, with the Senior Learning Mentor, Senior Speech and Language Therapist and Head of Counselling Service are all based in Woodlands Primary School.
- 3.3 The Cluster forms a distinct geographical zone within the Medway area. The schools serve comparatively deprived and needy communities living mainly in post 1945 public housing estates where educational qualifications and skills have traditionally been low. Although Medway ranks near the national average for overall deprivation, children from the Cluster schools are located in areas suffering comparatively high levels of poverty and low levels of educational skills and training (Chatham Central, Luton and Wayfield, Gillingham South and North, River and Twydall). Several wards fall within the

top 10% of the most deprived in the country. This deprivation is also reflected in the relatively high numbers of children with Special Educational Needs, which can constitute nearly half of the pupils in some Cluster schools.

- 3.4 There are four main strands to the Medway Excellence Cluster. These strands are:
- 1) Access to full time Learning Mentors for pupils who need them
 - 2) Counselling and Learning Support Units to tackle disruption
 - 3) Extended opportunities for More Able and Talented pupils
 - 4) The Tailored Strand (focusing on language enrichment for KS1 and the development of a PSHE curriculum for secondary schools)
- 3.5 There are also a number of centrally planned activities such as the use of Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) and allocation of funds to schools for “basic skills” projects.
- 3.6 In addition to the Excellence Cluster, the management team also co-ordinate the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP). BIP funding began 1 April 2005 and ceases in March 2008. Thirteen MECP schools are involved in the BIP. Although in its third year of operation, the BIP is new to Medway. It is one of the central elements of the Government’s strategy to improve behaviour and attendance in schools and is also an integral part of the drive to raise standards of teaching and learning. The four compulsory elements of the BIP are as follows:
- Provision for excluded pupils and strategies for reduced fixed term exclusions
 - Pupils at risk: allocation of key workers
 - Attendance
 - Full Service Extended School
- 3.7 Aimhigher: The Department for Education and Skills' Aimhigher campaign encourages young people to think about the benefits and opportunities of higher education (HE), especially young people from families with no tradition of higher education. Aimhigher funding comes to the Medway Excellence Cluster to be used to support students who have the potential to progress to higher education. The schools included in the Aimhigher programme are Chatham Grammar School for Girls, The Robert Napier School, New Brompton College and Mid-Kent College as an associate member.
- 3.8 An action plan has been drawn up by the Excellence Cluster Aimhigher Steering Group and this group also monitors the spend locally. The Steering Group reports back regularly to the Aimhigher Kent and Medway Executive Management Group who, in turn, are accountable to the Higher education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

- 3.9 The following table highlights the differences between the Education Action Zone and the MECP:

Education Action Zone	Medway Excellence Cluster
Received broadly the same level of funding	More focused expenditure, concentrating on need and following proven examples from other areas of the country.
Although in partnership with the LEA, the EAZ had a greater level of independence, e.g. a separate bank account	Works in closer partnership with the LEA
Themes as determined by agreed action plan	Clearly defined strands with strand leaders
Made up of 15 partnership schools	Made up of 21 Partnership schools
Two pilot Learning Mentors employed	A large team of Mentors based in MECP schools

- 3.10 The funding arrangements are outlined in the various action plans in the appendices, with detailed funding arrangements for MECP and BIP in particular outlined in appendices 6 and 7.
- 3.11 The MECP's management team ensures that partnership schools are subject to defined monitoring and evaluation procedures. Prior to each allocation of funds to a school, a project proposal form must be completed, providing details of the individual project and anticipated outcomes. As the projects progress, project evaluation forms are to be used to measure the impact of the scheme.
- 3.12 The Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) is a software package, purchased by the MECP for use by all Cluster pupils from KS2 upwards. The results from the PASS surveys will provide an accurate indication as to the developments made by pupils as a result of the various MECP interventions. A pupil database, documenting every MECP referral is also in operation; this will provide the Cluster with the ability to monitor pupil and strand progress and to evaluate the impact of interventions for individual pupils.
- 3.13 The Medway Excellence Cluster Partnership is a self-governing body. Management decisions are monitored by the Board and the management team is accountable for its actions. As the Excellence Cluster works in partnership with the LEA, its developments and impact are monitored by the senior management at the Authority.
- 3.14 The DfES monitors and evaluates the progress of the Behaviour Improvement Programme. The management team set stretching targets for each BIP school and the DfES measures progress over the course of the programme. In addition, we have external consultants, employed by Price Waterhouse Coopers, who advise on decisions and monitoring systems.

4 Financial and Legal Implications

4.1 Budget allocations (from 01/04/05 – 31/03/06, unless otherwise stated):

MECP: £838,586

MECP rolled forward from 2004 – 2005: £183,087

BIP: £780,000

Aimhigher (1/8/05 – 31/7/06): £217,000

4.2 Funding for the Cluster ceases in January 2008, whilst funding for the BIP has been secured until March 2008.

4.3 There are no direct budget or legal implications for Medway Council.

5 Background Papers

5.1 The following documents are attached:

- 1) MECP Action Plan (Appendix 1)
- 2) BIP Action Plan (Appendix 2)
- 3) MECP/BIP Newsletter (Appendix 3)
- 4) MECP/BIP Progress Report (Appendix 4)
- 5) Aimhigher Operational Plan (Appendix 5)
- 6) MECP Budget (Appendix 6)
- 7) BIP Budget (Appendix 7)

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