

## THE NATIONAL CHALLENGE IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

### What is the National Challenge?

The National Challenge is a government-funded programme to ensure that, by 2011, in every secondary school, at least 30% of students will achieve five or more GCSE grades at A\*-C including English and mathematics.

The National Challenge concentrates on supporting and challenging schools where recent results have been below this 30% 'floor target'. Some schools in Cambridgeshire have been included in the National Challenge because, although their 2008 results were above 30%, the Local Authority believes that the schools will benefit from additional support to help them sustain the progress made.

The schools in the National Challenge face difficult circumstances and most are doing a good job to secure the necessary improvements. The Local Authority and officers from the National Strategies believe that, with additional resources and focused support, these schools can improve further.

### Which schools are involved?

In Cambridgeshire, five schools are involved in the National Challenge programme. They are:

Coleridge Community College, Cambridge  
Manor Community College, Cambridge  
St Neots Community College, St Neots  
St Peter's School, Huntingdon  
Thomas Clarkson Community College, Wisbech

### What are they doing?

All schools in Cambridgeshire, including those in the National Challenge, have been working hard to improve outcomes for young people. National Challenge schools have worked with the Local Authority to produce Raising Achievement Plans (RAPs), which set out the actions being taken to secure the necessary improvements. Using central government funding, National Challenge Advisers have been appointed to work with each school, ensuring that good progress is made in relation to the RAP and that young people achieve their potential.

### Who are National Challenge Advisers?

National Challenge Advisers (NCAs) are experienced headteachers and/or school improvement professionals. They are accredited by central government, recruited and employed by the Local Authority and accountable to both the Local Authority and the National Strategies. They are deployed to National Challenge schools for a fixed number of days annually.

## **What support do the schools receive?**

In addition to having the services of a National Challenge Adviser, each school receives additional funding; extra support from consultants and other staff from the Local Authority and/or support from teachers in other schools; and, in some cases, formal partnerships with more successful schools and headteachers. In total, the government has made £490,000 available to support the five National Challenge schools in Cambridgeshire in the current year. This funding is being used mainly to:

- employ National Challenge Advisers and manage their work (70 days of NCA time has been funded for the current year);
- employ additional staff in schools to support improved provision;
- provide greater access for the schools to new National Strategies programmes focused on securing improvements in English and mathematics; and to
- fund partner schools and headteachers to develop support programmes for National Challenge schools.

## **How is progress monitored?**

NCAs are visiting schools on a regular basis to discuss the progress being made in each school and to agree next steps. NCAs report back in writing to the school, the Local Authority and the National Strategies after each visit. On a termly basis, NCAs attend the Local National Challenge Board meeting to discuss progress of schools with Local Authority and National Strategies officers, and agree any further support that may be necessary.

## **What happens if schools do not make the necessary progress?**

If a school does not get on track to achieve the target of at least 30% of students gaining at least five or more A\*-C grades including English and mathematics, the Local Authority will be expected to consider a structural solution. This could involve setting up a federation, a National Challenge Trust or an academy. At present, there are no plans for a structural solution in relation to any Cambridgeshire school.

## **Who can I contact to find out more about the National Challenge?**

There is detailed information about the National Challenge on [www.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalchallenge](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalchallenge). Guy Dickens, Head of Standards & Effectiveness: 11-19 is leading on the National Challenge arrangements in Cambridgeshire and can be contacted at [guy.dickens@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:guy.dickens@cambridgeshire.gov.uk).

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