

AT THE CHALK FACE...

A comprehensive look at all the latest stories and issues impacting on the education sector in Northern Ireland by **Kathryn Torney**

Early intervention is key to 'tackling social ills'

TACKLING problems in the community before they begin, rather than spending great sums on ineffective remedial policies really pays dividends, delegates at a seminar in Stormont's Parliament Buildings have been told.

Nottingham MP Graham Allen, chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership One Nottingham, told people at the event that early intervention is cheaper and more sensible than providing more prisons, police officers, drug rehabilitation programmes or more costly, lifetimes on benefits.

He also paid tribute to the work of the Together 4 All organisation and Barnardo's Northern Ireland.

"Nottingham has put a raft of early intervention policies in place," he said.

"Early Intervention is the key to tackling almost all our social problems. It is designed to give every baby, child and young person the social and emotional skills to make the best of themselves.

"A rounded, capable interactive child rarely becomes an offender, addict, fails to learn or aspire to work or becomes a poor parent."

Mr Allen emphasised that great innovation was taking place in

Nottingham and also in Northern Ireland.

The Together 4 All organisation is implementing early intervention through its Social and Emotional Learning Programme in primary schools in the Lurgan, Brownlow, Bleary and Aghagallon areas.

It hopes to roll the programme out in the future throughout Northern Ireland and beyond.

Nuala Magee, chief executive officer of Together 4 All, said: "We all have a responsibility to improve the lives of children and young people so that they may reach their full potential.

"Our programme concentrates on social and emotional learning that underpins all other areas of a child's development.

"The programme is backed by the theory on brain development. It shows that there is a good reason for teaching the lessons; indeed rigorous research has proven this to be the case."

Lynda Wilson, director of Barnardo's Northern Ireland, said: "It is evident from the seminar that a clear strategy and investment in early intervention benefits both children and society as a whole."