

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 23 May 2023

Key Issues for DEF to Note:

Admissions:

2. Term dates and Non pupil days

- Schools reminded to ensure that parents and staff are informed as soon as term dates and non-pupil days are agreed or amended, and the school information database is updated accordingly.

4. Numbers on roll and organisation

- Admissions team have asked all schools to respond to the information request regarding numbers on roll when it is received from the Admissions team.
- Schools are reminded that it is not lawful to insist on a parent / pupil meeting, or reports or references from the current school before agreeing an in-year admission.
- Fair Access Panel to reconvene to consider children returning to school from Alternative Provision, exclusion or referred to the LA on challenging behaviour grounds.

5. Delayed Admission Guidance

- DfE has refreshed its guidance for parents of summer born children.

7. Report of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator

- Five catchment area amendments due to closure of Chittlehampton Primary have now been agreed.

9. School Organisation:

- Bid for new Special Free School at Cranbrook has been successful
- Proposal to close Mill Water post-16 provision has been withdrawn.

11. Capital Programme:

- DfE Revised School Net Capacity Methodology programme to be relaunched in line with new school building guidance. All Secondary, Special and All through schools to be visited and assessed over the next 2-3 years.

Attendance

DCC

Neil Pateman (chair)
Shona Meek
Andrew Brent
Fran Butler
Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)

Built Environments Capital Programme Manager
Senior School Organisation Officer
Senior Policy Officer
Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Lead
Service Support Officer (E&L)

Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary

Penny Hammett

FORT Federation

Secondary

Phil Randall
Graham Hill

St Peters C of E VA School
Pilton Community College

Special School Heads

Stuart Allman

Pathfield School

DAG

Ian Rogers

Diocesan Representatives

Christina Mabin
Richard Power

Exeter Anglican Diocese (Admissions)
Exeter Anglican Diocese (Capital)

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Union Representative

Nigel Williams

Corporate Forum (Education) NASUWT

In Attendance

Nick Cook - *part*

South West Norse

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 7 March 2023

Outstanding actions:

- SN has ongoing discussions with the Regional Director Office and DfE Policy Unit, these will be completed and reported back to SOCA before DEF. There are currently issues regarding a request to direct an academy which will form a part of that report.
- **NP** to share draft FOI response regarding reinforced concrete.

Post meeting note:

- The FOI response that was sent to schools in January ref. Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is now out of date.
- Due to evolving guidance from the DfE we are currently planning further review and due diligence with SW Norse to ensure we have a robust methodology that aligns to the latest guidance published ([Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete \(RAAC\) estates guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))
- There is currently still no evidence of RAAC being present in schools DCC are responsible for.

- All other actions complete.
- Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

ACTION:

- **SN** to report back to SOCA around PAN increases to meet demand and latent capacity in Devon's secondary schools before DEF meeting.
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2. Admissions: Composite Prospectus

- Schools required to ensure school information is kept up to date and accurate on the schools information database.
- Admissions criteria will be rolled forward to ensure up to date for future academic year.
- Report noted.

3. Admissions: Non-Pupil days

- Schools urged to ensure that term dates and non-pupil dates are updated on the schools information database, and that parents and staff are informed as soon as dates are agreed.
- Dates may be changed during the school year, and school transport should be informed if there will be any implications.
- Assumption that Academies will also provide 190 days unless there is a strong reason where this cannot be delivered.
- Regulations expect that days lost to poor weather or exceptional circumstances are made up – any decision to close must be taken by the local governing body or Trust Board.

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4. Admissions: Numbers on roll and organisation

- Emails have been issued to Primary Schools requesting up to date information on numbers on roll prior to half term.
- Secondary schools will be asked to confirm the organisation of pupil numbers across the year groups. This will inform identification of future issues and possible prejudice which the LA needs to understand to support schools through any appeal process.
- Discussed delays where In-year admission is requested due to school insisting on meetings with parents prior to agreement. Schools are asked to note that any 'interview' process is not legal and should not form part of the decision to admit.
- Considered admission under Fair Access Protocol, and need for schools to respond to requests as quickly as possible.
- Additional information may be requested for Fair Access purposes, however this should not delay the process and a refusal on the basis of an identified additional need is not lawful.
- Improvement needed through strong partnership work across the Diocese and the LA support services – mindful of pressures on school resourcing children with identified additional need who will require additional support and resource to meet their needs.
- Considered need for increased clarity around data sharing, to show the situation is comparable for all maintained and academy schools being requested to admit more vulnerable and complex pupils.

ACTIONS:

- **All schools** to discuss with Admissions any changes to Admission Number and organisation
- **Primary schools and Secondary schools** to respond to information requests from Admissions team
- **All schools and trusts** requested to note advice from DfE on in-year admissions and ensure internal processes are compliant.

5. Admissions: Delayed admission guidance

- DfE have updated admission guidance including some slight changes, particularly affecting parents. DfE feels delayed admission works well nationally.
- Parents should apply in their child's normal admission cohort.
- Schools need to be satisfied that children would have access to the appropriate curriculum whether in Reception or Early Years settings.
- Sam Chapman keen to discuss at SOCA issues around Early Years children with SEND.
- LA working hard to ensure that parents and schools are fully informed of the longer-term implications of delayed admission.
- Report noted.

6. Admissions: Notifying parents of normal admissions round process.

- Primary schools have been particularly effective at flagging up need for year 6 families to apply for secondary places
- Considered permission around use of parent contact details to flag any messages regarding the admission process.
- Parents will be invited to give permission to use their information for specific admissions rounds at the same time that expressions of interest are requested. Reminders will continue to be sent by the admissions team.
- Admissions Facebook page increasing in popularity.

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- Report noted.

7. Admissions: Report of the Schools Adjudicator

- Annual report published by Schools Adjudicator, including information provided by LAs. This can highlight areas for future policy change.
- DCC has issued several requests for direction around admissions.
- Noted in-year variations increased during Pandemic linked to church attendance, which were approved.
- Five catchment area amendments due to closure of Chittlehampton have now been agreed.

8. Early Years Update

- Noted expansion of Early Years entitlement, encouraging parents returning to work.
- Noted possibility for providers to amend the staffing ratio for 2-year olds .
- Noted increase in interest in the number of registered childminders
- Noted arrangements for increased funded childcare entitlement to either 15 hours, or 30 hours for parents returning from maternity leave. This will lead to an expansion of places for children aged 9 months +
- Schools will be expected to offer 0800 – 1800 wrap around offers from September 2026, with expansion funded by government. Early Years team to contact schools shortly about this. Unclear of implications for capital funding. This could be through external providers / sports providers.
- Hoping that 2 year old funding rate will be increased which will help providers to retain and recruit staff and offset pressures for childcare for older age ranges. Have noted a particular need for level-3 qualified staff.
- Noted some issues around provider cash flow where LA payments do not seem to be timely – LA looking at how the sector can be better supported with monthly payments and skills in business and financial planning. EY digest provides updates on training opportunities for providers.
- SOCA were reminded that parents have a right to request wrap-around childcare and providers have a right to request the use of school premises. This has not been strongly promoted by DfE.
- Noted childminders may be invited to run wrap around childcare from school site under their own registration, which could be an option particularly for smaller rural schools.
- Survey shared seeking interest in free level 2 in-house EY Practitioner training.
- 20 hour entitlement to wrap around childcare available to service families.
- School leaders are reminded that the offer of a place in Reception is for a full time place from the first day of term. Staggered and part time entry can be difficult for working parents to facilitate.
- Early Years currently looking at how further support can be offered to Reception children with additional needs coming into Reception.

ACTION:

- Early Years update report to be circulated with minutes **(HWJ) - complete**

9. School Organisation Update

- Small schools data shared with SOCA. Noted the net effect of year 6 leavers and incoming starters to forecast numbers on roll going forwards. Meetings with schools, MATs and Local Learning Communities will be offered to discuss future cohorts, Local Plans, housing developments and other issues affecting demographics.

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- Bid for new special free school in Cranbrook has been successful. Potential sponsors may register interest by 16 June. Engagement event planned for 7 June.
- Proposal to close Mill Water post-16 provision has been withdrawn. Increase in registered places from 100 – 112 to be formally consulted on.
- Lowering age range proposals / approvals : Highweek, Denbury, / Bassetts Farm, Stoke Canon.
- Hearing Support Centre at Clyst Vale consulted to close – significant change request to be submitted to RD office.
- Still to hear from RD office on Axminster primary expansion.
- Noted approvals for Trust changes and Academy conversions.
- June Cabinet to consider purchase of site in Ivybridge to deliver a new 120 place special free school. Special Partnership Trust sponsoring.

10. SW Norse Update

- Devon Maintenance Partnership – membership numbers static, awaiting confirmation of academisations.
- Devon Academies Maintenance Agreement – in conversation with Ventrus MAT re. ongoing membership.

Service Provider delays:

- Automatic Doors contract providers behind schedule – understand works have been completed but issues around data transfer
- Lift contract – significant levels of delay. Action plan in place and making good progress.
- Lightning Protection – SW Norse in discussion with provider. Understand administration capacity in using Connect 2 to transfer data.
- Academies using alternative contractors on site continues to confuse the monitoring of performance

11. Capital Programme Update

- Schools capital maintenance schemes being prepared for tender to complete works over summer break. Market has shown improvement in contractor availability and willingness to tender.
 - DfE Revised School Net Capacity Methodology programme being relaunched to bring in line with new school building guidance. Every secondary, special and all through school to be visited and assessed over 2-3 years. Primary schools are not included.
 - Understand these visits will be a snapshot, but no expectation for LAs to routinely keep that information updated other than for maintained schools.
 - Details to be shared with minutes.
 - New formula in place for special schools – understand still to be formally adopted – **NP** to share information available.
 - No update available on Early Years area guidance for foundation stage accommodation capacity. Mindful that LA retains responsibility for EY and childcare place planning and knowledge of suitable and sustainable accommodation is important.
 - Schools Rebuilding Programme – expecting publication in July of timeframe for Devon schools. Mindful of recent flooding at Tipton – evidence has been submitted to DfE to support a prioritisation.
- DfE Revised School Net Capacity Methodology programme – details to be shared with minutes (**HWJ**) - **complete**
 - **NP** to share information available on special school capacity methodology

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SOCA thanked Neil for his chairing of the group over the last few years and wished him well for his next role.

Future meeting dates:

- **Tuesday 26 Sept 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 5 December 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 5 March 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)