

Report of the Cabinet Member Children's Services and Schools

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 20 February 2020:

1. By Councillor Hannaford on:

An update on the Schools Company Academy Trust from a Devon County Council perspective, including performance, outcomes, attainment and other general matters in addition to the matters below.

1. Schools Academy Trust

The Schools Company Trust have not provided Alternative Provision in Devon (or anywhere else) since Devon's provision was re-brokered, by the DfE, to a new sponsor in 2018. We have therefore provided below a summary of information relating to our historic concerns around The Schools Company Trust, the actions taken at the time and the new provision which is now in place.

The Schools Company Trust (SCT) was a Multi-Academy Trust, responsible for running Devon's Alternative Provision between March 2015 and Nov 2018. The Schools Company Trust were a DfE approved sponsor with experience in this type of provision. Initially the Trust's performance was considered acceptable however this was not sustained and, in March 2017, Devon raised our growing concerns directly with the Regional School Commissioner. Ofsted inspections during the Autumn 2017 confirmed the concerns we had raised with inadequate inspection outcomes at 2 of the 3 provisions. Whilst the local authority have no involvement with the finances of Academies we are aware that the DfE had also issued the Trust with a financial notice to improve. It should be noted that none of the reported overspends have been borne by Devon County Council.

As a result of these concerns for the majority 2018, the provision was managed by interim leadership provided through the DfE. This included a new CEO and Board of Trustees appointed by the DfE. Leadership support was also secured from another Multi-Academy Trust.

Following due process, in November 2018 the DfE appointed Wave Multi Academy Trust as the new sponsor for the Devon schools. Wave, a Cornwall based Multi-Academy Trust, are considered one of the highest performing alternative provision providers nationally with all seven of their schools in Cornwall either good or outstanding. There is a strong commissioning agreement between DCC and Wave which includes safeguarding audits across the four schools, termly roll reviews with lead commissioners and the strategic lead for inclusion, annual reporting and quality assurance visits.

A review of the first year of provision has demonstrated significant progress in leadership and safeguarding as well as changes in structure which will better support individual needs, in particular a new school focused on students who cannot attend school due to medical reasons. Funding for a replacement purpose-built provision in South Devon has been secured, underpinned by a capital contribution from DCC and a new centre in Exeter has opened, again supported by DCC. Feedback about the provision from mainstream schools has been positive and there is evidence of strong collaborative working across the County.

Wave attended a DCC Children's scrutiny masterclass in November 2018 to provide further information on the provision and to answer questions. They have recently been appointed as sponsor to the new special school in Newton Abbot, Glendinning house.

James McInnes
Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools