

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 22 September 2020

Attendance

DCC

Neil Pateman (chair)	Built Environments Capital Programme Manager
Andrew Brent	Policy Officer
Fran Butler (Apologies)	Early Years – Childcare Sufficiency Lead
Christine McNeil (Apologies)	School Organisation Policy Manager
Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)	Service Support Officer (E&L)

Devon Schools Leadership Support Services

Primary

Colin Butler	Otter Valley Federation
Penny Hammett	FORT Federation

Secondary

Daryll Chapman	Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust
Rob Haring (Apologies)	Ivybridge Community College

SENTient Heads

Sam Barham (Apologies)	Lampard Community School
Cherie White (Apologies)	Pathfield School

DAG

Ian Rogers

Diocesan Representatives

Tbc	Plymouth CAST
Christina Mabin	Exeter Anglican Diocese (Admissions)
Richard Power	Exeter Anglican Diocese (Capital)

Union Representative

Nigel Williams	Corporate Forum (Education) NASUWT
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In Attendance

Simon Niles	Schools Planning and Admissions Managers
Nigel Coleman (part)	NPS

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1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 3 March 2020

- **Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)** in settings and impact on outcomes – **FB** to provide update for group.
- NC confirmed that there are difficulties in providing trend data on maintenance checks due to changes in DAMA which does not require academies to report on the checks that they are undertaking. DCC holds no responsibility.
- Minutes agreed as an accurate version.

ACTION:

- **FB** to provide update for the group on the use of EYPP in Early Years settings

2. School Admissions Code Consultation

- Noted DfE consultation on changes to the Code. Proposed changes are not extensive, and some are positive:
- Decisions on in-year admissions would in future need to be made within 10 days and the parent notified. This could be within LA coordinated scheme or direct from the own admissions authority school.
- Fair Access Protocol amended to emphasise its use as a safety net for vulnerable children to access a local school place. Some concern around a requirement that children are out of school for 4-weeks before being included, the LA to consider how this could function through the coordinated scheme or FAP to ensure children are not out of school for that length of time.
- Amendments to provision for children in care, and Forces children.
- Devon template for individual school policies has already been amended to reflect the proposed changes.
- Noted use of nodal points (most useful in urban areas) which acknowledge difficulties in use of straight-line distances (e.g. addresses near a river /estuary)
- LA will prepare a response to the consultation, to be shared in due course.
- Transport policy – no major changes anticipated.
- Report noted.

3. Proposed Admission Arrangements

- As a mandatory requirement under the Code, admission arrangements must be published on Own Admission Authority School and Trust websites when determined, and be the same version as confirmed to the LA and then published on the DCC Sharepoint site.
- Faith schools to submit their arrangements for 2022 to the Diocese for consultation by 1 October.
- Noted the timetable for consultation and formal determination (minuted at a formal meeting of the governing body) of admissions arrangements prior to publishing on school and Trust websites.
- Report noted.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** requested to remind schools of the requirement to publish admission arrangements on websites, and relevant timescales.
- **DSLS** requested to remind schools to check their catchment areas via: www.devon.gov.uk/schoolareamaps

4. LA Annual Admissions Report 2020

- LA report has been submitted to Schools Adjudicator and is available to view at <http://devon.cc/annualreports>
- Any areas of particular interest to be forwarded to Andrew Brent to include in the next annual report.
- Report noted.

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4. Fair Access Protocol

- Thanks extended to the working group who have considered Devon's Fair Access Protocol.
- Mindful that proposed changes will require a further review by the working group. **AB** to arrange for the group to meet again.
- Will need to consider membership of and facilitation of virtual Fair Access Panels via Teams.
- Discussed concerns that proposed changes indicate potentially having to wait until children have been out of school for 4 weeks before FAP is instigated (for one of the new eligibility criteria). Will need to consider how this could be managed within the In-Year Coordinated Admissions scheme, rather than FAP, however this solution would not have same statutory status. DCC to work with schools for consensus and buy-in from all schools to commit to enabling children to be educated within their local communities, and to welcome additional children into their school through in-year admissions.
- Report noted

ACTION:

- **AB** to reconvene FAP working group to consider revisions required following proposals in Admissions Code consultation.
- **DSLS and DAG** to separately encourage discussions amongst school leaders and governors around the 4-week timeframe for children being out of school prior to Fair Access Protocol being instigated, and the commitment of schools to sign up to robust commitment to In Year Coordinated Admissions Scheme.

5. Covid-19 and Admissions

- Thanks extended by the Admissions team to all schools who supported processes during lockdown period to ensure continuing provision.
- Noted that DCC, through the admissions team, operated a business as usual approach as far as possible, compared to some other LAs; with normal admissions rounds unaffected.
- **Fair Access Protocol policy revision** achieved.
- **School Admissions Appeals** have been restarted with virtual meetings, which has been a positive development for many families. This is expected to continue until at least January 2021 and will look into how this could continue beyond that date in some circumstances.
- **Selective testing** has been affected, with in-year variations requested by grammar schools. Parents have been unable to select their preferences before the test results are known therefore an additional, 4th preference option has been available for families to select. Families had been advised to include a non-selective school within their preferences.
- SOCA considered the unforeseen consequences on a secondary school pupil profile where parents are choosing non-selective, local schools quite low down in their preferences. DCC however felt that children who have done well in the delayed selective tests will continue to be admitted to grammar schools, as would normally be the case, with limited impact on the non-selective schools.
- Impact on the 4th preference will be monitored and will be reported to SOCA in due course. Expecting increase in appeals for rejected applications for grammar schools this year.

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- **Faith Priority** based on church attendance has also been affected by lockdown, as churches have been closed. Exeter Diocese have agreed a form of words for a variation request for relevant schools for 2021 intake.
- **All future policies** are to be 'Pandemic-proofed' as far as possible to mitigate ongoing impact of Covid-19 on processes.
- **Children in Care applications** – mindful that there has been an increase in Devon children coming into care, notably due to the response to a negative ILACs inspection and the Covid response to increased number of children moving through the child protection system. Number of applications reduced in March-June but a significant increase towards the end of the summer holidays.
- Report noted.

6. Composite Prospectus

- DCC to publish by 12 September.
- Step by Step booklet has been updated.
- Individual school information to be checked and updated online by all schools.
- Report noted.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** requested to remind schools to check and update their local school information is accurate.

6. Review of Admissions round 2020

- 92.57% of parents were allocated their highest preference, and 97.41% allocated a place in one of their preferred schools. Only 193 children were not offered a place at any preferred school.
- Children who have not made an application are not offered places in the first admissions round, and will be considered during the second round. Thanks to schools in encouraging families to submit their applications in good time.
- Admissions data noted.
- Considered out of county placements (e.g. grammar school places in Torbay and proximity of Plymouth schools)
- Considered the variety of reasons for increase in number of secondary vacancies. Noted that increased capacity is being facilitated in areas of particular growth. Primary demographic burst is now working through the secondary system, with additional surplus capacity becoming more apparent.
- Noted reluctance of schools to formally reduce school place capacity and PAN.
- Report noted.

6. Early Years Update

- Paper had been circulated to the group.
- SOCA members to contact fran.butler@devon.gov.uk if there are any queries.

7. School Organisation Update

Covid Update

- DCC involved in daily calls with Regional Schools Commissioner re. levels of pupil attendance.
- Devon schools have worked well to enable learners to be welcomed back to school – Approximately 89% Devon children back in (normally approx. 96%) which is in line with national picture.

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- Data from DfE currently showing children with a statutory plan – 89% children with Social Worker 86%. Schools encouraged to continue to submit daily attendance data.
- DCC checking in with schools with low attendance, especially for children with EHCPs, and vulnerable children known to social care.
- Ongoing with issues with testing, and attendance of symptomatic children / bubbles isolating. Schools liaising with PHE where appropriate.
- Local Learning Communities have been re-established and are worked well as a communication conduit between schools, DCC central services and DfE messages during Covid.
- DCC keen for the LLC support to continue to be available with named DCC and Babcock officers allocated to each LLC.

School Organisation

- *Colin Butler declared an interest pertaining to this item.*
- SOCA noted the emerging plan to deliver 300 new Special School places through corporate capital investment.
- New special school is currently being planned in Okehampton. Noted planning process delayed due to statutory objection. Approval for funding to be considered at October Cabinet. Potential opening as early as Sept 22 or Sept 23 at the latest.
- Noted the Okehampton site was available to DCC, and is well positioned to support learners with special needs within an acceptable travelling distance.
- Noted the potential purchase of a site in Bideford to provide additional SEMH provision. Additional capacity in a number of other maintained special schools being developed.
- New Glendinning special school has now opened in temporary accommodation, with move to permanent buildings planned before Christmas.
- Thanks to DCC capital teams for their support in these projects.
- SOCA noted status of new school developments across the county.
- Noted possible issues linked to granting of planning permission for the new Tipton St John build, and wider implications of the withdrawal of District planning authorities from the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan.
- New Planning White Paper to define national infrastructure parameters.

Viability of Small primary schools (less than 50)

- SOCA discussed. Financially, schools with very small numbers appear sustainable due to level of lump sum funding, which is not apparent in other types of school.
- Monitoring list of all small schools to be discussed at next meeting.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** asked to reinforce message to schools through newsletter to continue to submit daily attendance data to DfE during ongoing pandemic.
- Small schools monitoring to be considered at next SOCA meeting. **SN**

8. NPS Update

- Devon Maintenance Partnership dashboard – June, July & August was a difficult period, but 92.2% compliance was achieved. Expecting October report to reflect a catch up in out-of-tolerance areas which could not be checked earlier due to access issues.
- Noted that there have been issues arising from schools reluctant to provide access to visiting contractors during the school day. HSE has been clear that compliance and statutory maintenance testing continue. Schools are

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encouraged to facilitate access requests to enable this work to be undertaken.

- Noted additional safety measures being put in place by contractors who have committed to giving as much notice as possible.
- Report noted.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** asked to encourage schools to facilitate access to school premises for compliance and statutory testing.

4. Capital Programme Update

- Challenges in delivering capital programme during Covid-19 noted.
- Contractors on the whole were able to continue to work, but some sites were closed resulting in project delay. Most contractors have been locally based.
- 27 schemes (over £3m value) have been completed over the summer.
- Two schemes deferred to Summer 2021 due to risks associated with Pandemic.
- Additional Capital Funding allocation of £2.1m was announced in July for school maintenance, which will enable some schemes to be brought forward in the programme. Approx. £500k has been made available to Exeter Diocese for VA scheme.
- Noted that academy maintenance allocations, through formula, will also have been increased.
- Noted new Priority Schools Building Programme (round 3) expected – details still to be announced. Noted current investigation by DfE on specific school building types.
- DfE currently looking at net capacity methodology with a view to simplifying, and aligning net capacity with building bulletin guidance. Expecting this will involve a national survey programme. Understand there are some issues nationally around lack of data on Academy schools.
- Update noted.

Future meeting dates:

- **Tuesday 1 December 2020** (9.30 – 11.30) – Teams Meeting
- **Tuesday 2 March 2021** (9.30 – 11.30) – venue TBC
- **Tuesday 25 May 2021** (9.30 – 11.30) – venue TBC
- **Tuesday 21 September 2021** (9.30 – 11.30) – venue TBC
- **Tuesday 7 December 2021** (9.30 – 11.30) – venue TBC
- **Tuesday 1 March 2022** (9.30 – 11.30) – venue TBC