

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 6 December 2022

Key Issues for DEF to Note:

Admissions:

- **Item 2. Delayed Transition to Secondary School** – Admissions team encouraging early conversations between parents, primary and secondary schools about the transition of learners offset from their normal year group.
- **Item 3. Non-pupil days and setting school term dates** - Schools are encouraged to coordinate as closely as possible with the LA agreed term dates and schools in the local area. Different dates can impact heavily on families' holiday and childcare arrangements and school transport costs; schools are encouraged to consider this impact.
- **Item 6. Compliance with School Admissions Code** – concerns around a range of measures and explanations some schools are employing which are unlawful and could lead to appeal which include: lack of resources to meet the needs of a child with some additional needs; course or curriculum requirements; perceived risk of challenging behaviour without appropriate assessment and mitigation.
- **Item 7. Nursery Admissions Policy** - SOCA confirmed agreement for the revised policy document to be published in January.
- **Item 7. Childcare Sufficiency Childcare Sufficiency Report** - concerns around recruitment difficulties, with settings reducing numbers of admissions to maintain child/adult ratios, increasing fees as providers pass on rising costs; low take up of free school meals in nursery provision; and challenges around managing the needs of very young children with SEND and lack of clarity for settings and parents.
- **Item 8. Proposed Term Dates** - concerns around imbalance in length of summer half terms for 24-25 academic year. Impact on curriculum delivery and a long second half term largely due to late Easter and earlier second May bank holiday. Only 3 Mondays in first half of summer term may impact negatively on curriculum, particularly for options subjects in secondary.
- **Item 9. SW Norse** - concerns around contractor performance which have resulted in compliance issues for regular maintenance checks.

Attendance

DCC

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

Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary

Colin Butler	Otter Valley Federation
Penny Hammett	FORT Federation

Secondary

Phil Randall	St Peters C of E VA School
Graham Hill	Pilton Community College

Special School Heads

Stuart Allman	Pathfield School
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DAG

Ian Rogers

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Diocesan Representatives

Vacancy
Christina Mabin
Richard Power

Diocese of Plymouth
Exeter Anglican Diocese (Admissions)
Exeter Anglican Diocese (Capital)

Union Representative

Nigel Williams

Corporate Forum (Education) NASUWT

In Attendance

Nick Cook - *part*

South West Norse

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1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 27 September 2022

Thanks were given to Colin Butler for his long-standing contributions and support to the SOCA group and to Education in Devon. Thanks in particular for the support and challenge that Colin has provided in shaping the Fair Access Protocol. Best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Outstanding actions:

- **AB** to share details of families providing 3 school preferences but not receiving a place at any of their preferred schools
- Considered hosting admissions arrangement webinars – **PH** to raise with schools whether follow up briefings on admissions arrangements would be helpful. Noted that Christina Mabin also holds similar events for church schools.
- **HWJ** to check future meeting dates
- All other actions complete.
- Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

2. Admissions: Delayed Transfer to Secondary School

- SOCA considered follow up to report at September meeting.
- Secondary schools have been advised to consider all children offset from their normal year group on a case by case basis to ensure that measures put in place relating to transfer to the secondary phase are in the child's and the school's best interest.
- **AB** to write to primary schools with year 5 children who are offset to encourage early conversations between parents, primary and secondary schools about delayed transfer.
- There were some concerns that not all secondary schools are discussing delayed transfer arrangements with parents or primary schools. It is a lawful option for parents to seek delayed admission, but schools should engage to ensure that delayed transfer is considered appropriately.
- Noted potential impact on further education which is restricted to 3 years of funded education. Secondary heads were keen that schools should flag this to parents in Year 7.
- Discussed issues around post-18 learner requirements for FE. Noted most would join for a 2-year programme so the learner would be known by the time they were 18. Headteacher discretion to seek DBS checks.

ACTION

- **AB** to write to all primary schools with year 5 learners on roll who are year 6 age to encourage early conversations between parents, primary and secondary schools about the transition of offset learners.

3. Admissions: Non-Pupil Days – setting school term dates

- Individual Schools set timings of the school day and determine dates of non-pupil days and holidays which they are encouraged to coordinate as closely as possible with the agreed dates and those of schools in the local area. Different dates can impact heavily on families' holiday and childcare arrangements and school transport costs; schools are encouraged to consider this impact.
- Schools are asked to check information at www.devon.gov.uk/termdates, for accuracy and confirm dates for 23/24 via schoolclosuredates@mailbox@devon.gov.uk.
- Caution is encouraged around parents relying on third party websites publishing term dates, which could then be used for example to book family holidays. Schools may wish to flag this to families.

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- DSLS to encouraged schools to check information at www.devon.gov.uk/termdates, for accuracy and confirm dates for 23/24 via schoolclosuredates-mailbox@devon.gov.uk.

4. Admissions: LA Annual Report 2022

- Report was submitted by 31 October 2022 covering admissions processes, policies and data.
- A number of points were raised within the report on a number of areas for consideration by the Office of School's Adjudicator including: admissions out of normal year group, 'in-year variation' process for academies, 'direction to admit' process for academies, sixth form admissions and summer-born children and delayed admission.
- Any items to be included in 2023 annual report to be sent to andrew.brent@devon.gov.uk

5. Admissions: Proposed Admission Arrangements 2024-25

- Local Authority and individual schools formal consultation ends 8 January for Cabinet determination of the LA admission arrangements.
- Feedback received largely relates to the change in catchment area proposals. Noted changes have been proposed to ensure boundaries follow features e.g. (roads / hedges) to ensure allocation is as fair and equitable as possible.
- Own Admission Authority Schools were reminded to hold meeting of governing body to determine admission arrangements before end February.

6. Admissions: Compliance with School Admissions codes

- Noted areas of non-compliance around lack of resources to meet the needs of a child with some SEN. Noted resourcing challenges in schools, however children should be attending their local school where possible and it is unlawful for schools to refuse on grounds of additional needs.
- Perceived threat of potential admission based on reports of challenging behaviour or popularity are non-compliant. Risks must be assessed and mitigated where appropriate between the LA and school.
- Course requirements – e.g. a match for GCSE options for a child moving into the area, or a cohort of learners has previously followed a different curriculum to that used in the school.
- It is unlawful to set working PANs that do not follow a consistent pattern throughout the school. If this is not applied the school will be vulnerable to appeal.
- Some schools have delayed admission until the school has 'met' the learner which would be determined as an unlawful interview process.
- Heads expressed thanks to Andrew and the Admissions team for the quality and clarity of information and advice that is provided to schools.

7. Early Years Update

Nursery Admissions Policy

- Considered the Nursery Admission Application Form which should be read alongside the policy. Shared concerns that new parents may not read and understand the policy template and how the entitled hours are offered and applied for.
- Suggested highlighting to parents on the form that an understanding of the policy is important before completing the DCAP application form.

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- Schools are encouraged to work with parents to support them in completing their applications
- SOCA confirmed agreement for the revised policy document to be published in January.

Childcare Sufficiency Report

- Childcare provision up to age 18
- Particular concerns around impact of recruitment challenges, with settings closing baby rooms, reducing numbers of admissions to maintain child/adult ratios.
- Attempting to encourage more staff into the sector, but low wages and high levels of responsibility are not attractive.
- Increase in fees expected from January with providers passing on increasing costs. Parents may reduce number of childcare hours being taken up.
- Patterns in demand and take up to be covered in provider and parent childcare survey.
- Noted low take up of free school meals in nursery provision. Early Years team to renew effort to inform parents of their entitlement.
- Noted challenges around managing the needs of children with SEND and lack of clarity for settings and parents.
- Cabinet to consider the report.

Take up

- High take up of 2 year old places, but not taking up full 15 hours per week. This group is most disadvantaged children and hope is to give this group the best possible start.
- 3 and 4 year old entitlement and extended entitlement take up is increasing
- Concerns around downward trend in take up of 2 year old entitlement which will be monitored and analysed to ascertain reasons for this.
- All parents encouraged to access Citizens Portal so that the LA can check eligibility for childcare and education funding including free school meals and early years pupil premium.
- Secondary schools encouraged to consider establishing childcare provision on site if they have any vacant accommodation.

ACTION:

- **FB** to highlight nursery policy document on DCAF application form.
- **DSLS** to encourage schools to include nursery application and policy documents on their websites and to provide support to parents completing their application.

8. School Organisation Update

- **Significant change proposals** Noted proposals for Axminster primary academy, Braunton College, Marland School, Ashwater Community Primary,
- Stokeinteignhead Primary proposing change of category from Community to Foundation Trust
- Formal consultation planned with all schools, DSLS, Diocese, Union reps and other LAs on proposed term dates.
- **Term Dates** Noted concerns around imbalance in length of summer half terms for 24-25 and 25/26 academic years, with impact on curriculum delivery and a long second half of summer term. Noted impact of late Easter and May half term being linked to the second May bank holiday to avoid clashes with exam timetable. Concerns around only 3 Mondays in first half of summer term may impact negatively on curriculum, particularly for options in secondary.

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- Noted that schools have some flexibility around using occasional days available to them.
- Shona undertook to have a further look at possible alternative options to reduce 8-week lead-in to summer.
- **Academisation** Noted schools which have consulted to covert to academy status.
- Noted Government plan for all schools to academise by 2030. Diocese encourages schools to be entering into strong partnership arrangements
- New school Matford Brook Academy planned to open in Sept 2023.
- Swimbridge CofE Primary has returned to its site from Chittlehampton following completion of works. Chittlehampton site now handed over to Trustees
- **Local Plans** Processes have gained momentum,
- Local Learning Community meetings, remotely on Teams, will be set up to discuss local plans and the associated infrastructure arrangements.
- LA will be submitting evidence to the local planning process.

ACTION

- **SM** undertook to have a further look at possible alternative options to reduce 8-week lead in to summer.

9. SW Norse Update

- Noted impact on Devon Maintenance Partnership of schools joining Multi Academy Trusts.
- Noted concerns around contractor performance which have been raised and discussed with individual contractors.
- Action plan in place with Cannings to reduce number of overdue services (electrical testing).
- IT difficulties have impacted on Churchill – regular quality monitoring in place.
- Correspondence has been sent to contractors to remind them of their responsibility to undertake contractual duties within appropriate timeframes.
- Staff recruitment and retention is particularly challenging at this time.
- Noted significant downward trend in compliance and quality of work.
- Working with DCC Procurement team on renewal of contracts which are due to complete in March 2024. Number of corporate and schools sites have varied significantly since contracts were agreed 8 years ago.

10. Capital Programme Update

- On target to complete 90% of programmed work this financial year. Some issues around ecological challenges, contractor availability and cost have caused difficulties.
- Noted increase in contractors tendering for jobs
- Capital Maintenance Programme £3.5m work planned to be delivered across 30 projects on 28 sites for 2023/24. Project details to be submitted to Cabinet in February.
- Announcement on School Rebuilding Programme expected before Christmas.
- HSE still visiting schools to check asbestos management plans. NO issues have been raised for Devon schools visited
- DfE now revisiting capacity methodology – DfE will engage in national surveying for special schools and secondary schools. Primary schools will be left to local governing authorities to survey.

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- Additional capital funding for schools to improve energy efficiency announced; delivery appears to be in a very short timeframe.
- Noted change in split site criteria – concerned that more schools will now meet new criteria and queried who will be looking into the definition. **Neil Pateman** to look into this for an update at next meeting. Noted some schools are also running off-site early years provision which may be eligible.

Future meeting dates:

- **Tuesday 7 March 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 23 May 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 26 Sept 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 5 December 2023** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 5 March 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)