

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 5 December 2023

Key Issues for DEF to Note:

Item 3: School Term Times / School Day

Concerns had been raised that LA published term dates may be misleading to parents assuming those dates refer to all Devon schools. The LA proposes to change the way that this information is shared, with the intention that this will encourage parents to refer to individual school websites to confirm their local term time arrangements.

Item 4: Flexi-Schooling

A Flexi-Schooling Protocol has been introduced for schools to outline circumstances where parental requests should be considered. Noted that flexi-schooling at secondary is difficult to manage due to timetabling constraints. Heads are encouraged to consider the safeguarding impact of flexi-schooling requests, for the hours the child is not at school. Information to be requested from schools on flexi-schooling arrangements.

Item 5: Early Years

Noted that as additional childcare entitlement hours become available, parents of children already at an EY setting in a community or VC school will be prioritised ahead of parents of children on a waiting list. It is proposed that this will improve consistency of access to a childcare setting. Recruitment campaigns ongoing to increase staff in Early Years and childcare settings, and childminders. SOCA noted the LA concerns around sufficiency of childcare places for under 2s from September 2025 and were concerned that schools will be under pressure to help to resource an increase in this provision.

Item 6: School Organisation:

Noted current proposals to create Resource Bases at Brixington and Holsworthy Community college to be considered by Regional Schools Board on 13/12. DCC aims to increase resourced provision in mainstream schools by 200 places over the next 3 years.

Item 7: SW Norse Update

SOCA noted that tenders for new Service Term Contracts are due w/b 11 December. Noted concerns around contractor performance in specific areas are being addressed by SW Norse and DCC colleagues.

Item 8: Capital Programme:

2024/25 Schools capital maintenance schedule currently being prepared, this will include several emergency schemes putting pressure on budget availability. Awaiting outcomes of 11 RAAC surveys (involving asbestos or need to access areas at height).

Attendance

DCC

Katherine Crompton (chair)

Simon Niles - **Apologies**

Shona Meek

Andrew Brent

Fran Butler

Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)

Capital Programme Manager, Built Environments

Strategy, Schools Planning and Admissions

Senior School Organisation Officer

Senior Policy Officer

Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Lead

Service Support Officer (E&L)

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Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary

Penny Hammett
David Perkins

FORT Federation
Littletown Academy

Secondary

Graham Hill

Pilton Community College

Special School Heads

Stuart Allman

Pathfield School

DAG

Ian Rogers

Diocesan Representatives

Vacancy
Christina Mabin - part
Richard Power - part

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

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 26 September 2023

Outstanding actions:

- Use of vacant capacity in school – Simon Niles following up with RD office.
- Teachers JCNC to consider issues around making up lost school days.
- **AB** to look at how smaller schools are notified of in-year online admissions applications.
- Other actions completed or in hand.
- Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

2. Admissions: LA Admissions Annual Report

- LA provides annual statutory report to Office of Schools' Adjudicator.
- SOCA recommended the specific concerns raised by the Local Authority to the OSA.
- Report to OSA is submitted annually at end of October – schools may raise any issues for inclusion in the report to andrew.brent@devon.gov.uk

3. Admissions: School Term Times / School Day

- Concerns had been raised that LA published term dates may be misleading to parents assuming those dates refer to all Devon schools. The LA consults on an annual timetable of 197 days, from which schools allocate non-pupil days.
- The LA proposes to change the way that this information is shared, principally making this available only to LA and schools. It is intended that this will encourage parents to refer to individual school websites to confirm their local term time arrangements.
- LA is reviewing the information that is provided online by schools and multi academy trusts to enable clear and consistent information for staff and

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families about the timings of the school day and determined school term times.

- Noted the school week should be 32.5 hours which refers to the total length of the school week of including lunchtimes, breaks, and directed teaching hours. SOCA were reminded that EY entitlements include lunchtimes.
- Noted that alongside an ongoing priority to extend out of school childcare provision, there may be less clarity around the length of the school day.
- Noted that there have been instances where schools have changed school term times during the academic year, e.g. to enable a school joining a MAT to fall in line with wider MAT arrangements. This can cause issues where families and staff had already confirmed holiday arrangements.
- **AB** to discuss the presentation of the online school term timetable with Education Systems Team.
- Schools with their own Early Years provision there should also provide clarity on their website around the nursery admission arrangements, and how/when families can access their full entitlement.
- Noted need to consider communications to parents who were accustomed to finding information on the LA webpages.
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ACTION:

- **AB** to discuss the presentation of the online school term timetable with Education Systems Team.

4. Admissions: Flexi-Schooling

- Noted previous DfE and LA position to discourage flexi-schooling arrangements, however, it is recognised that this may be appropriate under specific circumstances, e.g. phased return from medical absence.
- A Flexi-Schooling Protocol has been introduced for schools to outline circumstances where parental requests should be considered. This guidance will be updated where DfE guidance highlights a change in approach.
- Noted that some schools are offering a flexi-schooling arrangements where parents are requesting this as a lifestyle choice.
- SOCA discussed the impact on secondary education where a child has been flexi-schooled throughout primary. It was felt this situation is similar to a child being educated out of year; the secondary headteacher would be required to decide their approach from year 7. There were concerns around transitions preparations in these instances, which could be on a phased basis. To support this approach, it was acknowledged that some flexi-schooled learners may not be able to access a full GCSE programme.
- Noted that flexi-schooling at secondary is difficult to manage due to timetabling constraints.
- AB confirmed that a child should be authorised as absent when not at school if on a flexi-schooling arrangement.
- Heads need to consider the safeguarding impact of flexi-schooling requests, for the hours the child is not at school. Schools are not responsible for setting learning for the time the child is not attending school.
- Concerns were shared about the accountability for child's attainment or academic progress.
- SOCA agreed that it would be helpful to request information from schools: which schools have agreed flexi-school arrangements, reasons for granting requests, number of requests being received for flexi-schooling. Will be useful to compare this data to requests for EHE, and arrangements to address poor attendance or behaviour management.

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- AB confirmed that flexi-schooling arrangements should be notified to the local authority. **AB** to check this is included in the guidance.

ACTIONS:

- **AB** to re-share the Flexi-Schooling protocol, with a request for feedback on any areas which may require further clarification. **Post meeting note:** please see link: [Flexi-schooling](#)
- **AB** to check requiring schools to notify the LA of flexi-schooling arrangements is included in the guidance.
- **AB** to outline information to be requested from schools.
- **DSLS** to share survey to request flexi-schooling feedback from schools

5. Early Years Update

- Noted proposed changes in reporting of childcare sufficiency information linked to incoming changes to funding of childcare entitlements.
- DCC Nursery Admissions over-subscription criteria now separately published for under 2s, 2year olds and 3&4 year olds – will lead to schools being encouraged to familiarise themselves with the new criteria and consider establishment of a Nursery Admissions panel to consider admissions.
- Noted that as additional hours become available to parents, this will now prioritise parents of children already at that EY setting, ahead of parents of children on a waiting list. It is proposed that this will improve consistency of access to a childcare setting.
- Noted ongoing campaigns to promote recruitment of staff in Early Years and childcare settings, and childminders. This will be crucial to the development of an 8-6 wraparound childcare provision which primary schools will be expected to be offered by September 2026.
- Noted the Provider Self Update portal for Early Years and Childcare providers will be available from January 2024. This will automatically update information available to parents and carers, and enhance sufficiency and capacity data available to the LA.
- Noted LA concerns around sufficiency of childcare places for under 2s from September 2025. Schools will be under pressure to help to resource this provision, and noted knock-on impact on the physical capacity on school sites that is fit for purpose, particularly for all-year round provision, which could restrict access to school sites for invasive capital works.
- Noted term-time nursery provision successfully operates on secondary school site where there is adequate demand from education staff.
- Mindful of the current pressure on schools, particularly where there are significant challenges being managed by school leaders. Alternative options could include increasing childminder availability, particularly in rural areas.
- Felt it would be useful to learn from schools that are already successfully operating a full-year early years provision.

6. School Organisation Update

- Noted current proposals to create Resource Bases at Brixington and Holsworthy Community college to be considered by Regional Schools Board on 13/12. The overall aim is to increase resourced provision by 200 places over the next 3 years. Noted Union support for the development of this provision.
- Consultation on proposal to lower the age range of Langtree Primary has led to concerns being raised by parents around the impact of caring for younger children on Reception aged children in the Foundation Stage Unit.

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Further information has now been provided to Cabinet so a decision can be made as to whether to continue with the statutory process.

- Noted clarity around Axminster decision delay has been requested of Regional Director.
- Trinity School – noted school converted to Academy on 1 Dec, however TUPE meetings have not yet taken place; Devon HR and Union keen to take part in these meetings – **SM** to flag this to schools during Academisation process
- Interviews for academy sponsor of Cranbrook special school taking place currently, potentially opening September 2026.
- New Cranbrook primary school - Understand S106 is close to being finalised, with potential opening 2026 or 2027.
- Noted schools joining or changing academy trusts.
- Noted that no children were currently on roll at the Clyst Vale Hearing Support resource base which has consulted on closure. The school feel that the school and staffing are well resourced to meet learners' needs within the mainstream classroom environment. Noted concerns around capital adaptations to ensure learners are adequately considered – Shona and Katherine to discuss.

ACTION:

- **SM** to flag to schools the need for HR and Union representation at school TUPE meetings during Academisation process
- **SM and KC** to discuss concerns around capital adaptations required to ensure HI learners are adequately considered in a mainstream environment.

7. SW Norse Update

- DMP and VA Promise cost models to be reconsidered ahead of contract changes. Cost model for DMP is likely to remain on basis of pupil numbers on roll. Noted VA Promise is also on a cost per pupil update.
- Noted tenders for new Service Term Contracts are due w/b 11 December.
- Nick Cook and Richard Power to consider future arrangements for VA Promise
- Noted specific concerns around timescale for the tendering of for lift maintenance contract.
- NC discussing operation of the current DAMA model with multi academy trusts. Expecting to propose that service term contracts will no longer be included beyond 31 March 24, as MATs are not consistently using DCC service term contracts or the Connect 2 system to track compliance. This can have significant knock-on implications for the LA ensuring that critical maintenance and checks have been completed e.g. following a fire.
- Noted difficulties with service provider for automatic door maintenance and Legionella / Thermostatic mixing controls; working with DCC procurement to manage this for the remainder of the current contract.
- Lightning protection – understand work has been completed however due to administrative issues, the Connect 2 database has not been updated.
- Noted communications have been shared with schools around facilitated access to school sites during school hours. Contractors will be asked to feedback where access is an issue to meeting compliance expectations, to enable follow up with individual schools, particularly where there are health and safety concerns with compliance being out of tolerance.

ACTION:

- **NC** to meet with Richard Power to discuss future VA Promise arrangements

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8. Capital Programme Update

- Team is currently preparing schools capital maintenance programme, this will include several emergency schemes putting pressure on budget availability. Planned work does not currently include adaptations requests.
- Basic need projects are going well, with expansion of secondary provision at Cranbrook Education Campus.
- Looking to seek approval for funding to self-deliver Cranbrook Special School project.
- Still awaiting DfE methodology for special school net capacity reviews.
- 3 maintained community school developments ongoing.
- RAAC Update: KC seeking confirmation that Devon VC or community schools have no RAAC; awaiting outcomes of 11 surveys (involving asbestos or at height). **KC** to keep FB aware of any issues concerning schools with nursery provision.
- RP confirmed that one CofE faith academy inspection is outstanding due to presence of asbestos.

ACTION:

- **KC** to liaise with Simon Niles to confirm list of any academy schools with RAAC detected.
- **KC** to keep Fran Butler aware of any issues concerning schools with nursery provision.

9. AOB

- Noted circulation of briefing from Sam Chapman on use of the term statutory / compulsory school age. Any queries to be directed to sam.chapman@devon.gov.uk

Future meeting dates:

- **Tuesday 5 March 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 14 May 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 24 September 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 3 December 2024** (9.30 – 11.30)
- **Tuesday 4 March 2025** (9.30 – 11.30)