

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 3 December 2024

Key Items for DEF to note:

Item 2: Children Missing Education Policy

- **SOCA recommended** the Children Missing Education policy for DEF endorsement

Item 3: Elective Home Education Policy

- **SOCA recommended** the Elective Home Education policy for DEF endorsement

Item 4: Fair Access Panel

- Further headteacher representatives are requested to come forward to sit on Fair Access Panel.

Item 7: School Organisation Update

- At the November meeting, Devon Education Forum had raised a query around falling demographics in primary schools. It was confirmed that the strategic planning team had previously offered visits to discuss emerging data with local learning communities to inform their planning. SOCA was keen that schools in particular in rural areas, are kept up to date with new areas of development. A review and update of the local area data to be requested.

Item 8: School Capital Maintenance Programme

- Surveys have been circulated to all schools re. solar panels, and to maintained schools re. school condition survey. Schools encouraged to respond to the surveys to inform work programme within Built Environments Team, to improve accuracy of locally held data on the condition of Devon's schools, and reducing the number of reactive and ad-hoc work not planned into the programme.

Attendance

DCC

Katherine Crompton (Chair)

Capital Programme Manager, Built Environments

Shona Meek

Senior School Organisation Officer

Andrew Brent

Senior Policy Officer

Fran Butler (**apologies**)

Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Lead

Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)

Service Support Officer (E&L)

Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary

Penny Hammett

FORT Federation

David Perkins

Littletown Academy

Secondary

Representative TBC

Special School Heads

Stuart Allman (**apologies**)

Pathfield School

DAG

Ian Rogers

Diocesan Representatives

Kirsty Wright

Diocese of Plymouth

Christina Mabin - **part**

Exeter Anglican Diocese (Admissions)

Richard Power - **part**

Exeter Anglican Diocese (Capital)

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 3 December 2024

Union Representative

Caroline Harding

Joint Secretary, NASUWT

In Attendance

Nick Cook - *part*

South West Norse

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 24 September 2024

Outstanding actions:

- Flexi-schooling guidance to be provided to schools **ACTION: AB**
- In year admissions – schools had requested a prompt when admissions come onto the Portal. All schools should receive AnyComms notifications twice weekly highlighting if a new application is on the Portal. **ACTION:** to be reviewed at next meeting.
- Noted that some children with EHCPs moving into the area have been managed through the admissions team rather than the SEND Statutory Team. Noted that the common application form asks if a child has an EHCP, however if this is not disclosed it could hinder the school meeting the child's SEN needs.
- All other actions complete. Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

ACTION:

- Flexi-schooling guidance to be provided to schools **ACTION: AB**
- **ACTION: AB** Anycomms notifications re. in-year admissions on portal to be reviewed at next meeting.

2. Admissions: Children Missing Education Policy

- SOCA requested to recommend the new CME policy to be endorsed at Devon Education Forum.

ACTION:

- **SOCA recommended the Children Missing Education policy for DEF endorsement**

3. Admissions: Elective Home Education Policy

- SOCA requested to recommend the new EHE policy to be endorsed at Devon Education Forum.
- Noted the important role that schools have in implementing this policy, helping parents to make an informed decision and potentially avoiding children becoming CME where circumstances are not appropriate.
- Noted that a written notification from a parent of their intention to home educate should be a formal notification to take the child off the school roll, and the local authority EHE team would step in to coordinate formal arrangements.
- **ACTION: AB and PH** to discuss a specific case.
- Noted there is ongoing tension between the flexi-schooling and EHE. The school clearly remains responsible for the child's attainment and safeguarding where they remain on roll in a flexi-schooling arrangement.
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ACTION:

- **ACTION: AB and PH** to discuss a specific case.
- **SOCA recommended the Elective Home Education policy for DEF endorsement**

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 3 December 2024

4. Admissions: Fair Access Panel

- SOCA considered the data from the 20 Tier 2 Fair Access Panel considerations.
- Fair Access Tier 1 data to be brought to a future SOCA meeting.
- Headteachers and a Trust representative attend the panel fortnightly. Further representation would be welcomed from across the county, particularly North or West Devon to help avoid conflicts of interest.
- Noted that a school or AP place must still be allocated even where a school response to the admissions team is not received. Schools reminded that if a School Information Sheet is shared with a school that it must be returned.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** asked to encourage further headteacher representatives to come forward from N and W Devon to sit on Fair Access Panel.
- **DSLS** to remind schools that if a School Information Sheet is shared with a school regarding an in-year admission, that it must be returned to the admissions team.

5. Early Years Update

- School based nursery capital grant – if interested in applying, schools should contact the school place planning team where provision can be reviewed alongside emerging development and demographic information.
- Mindful that regulations for church land and buildings must be considered by the Diocese where church schools heads and Trusts are considering developments.
- Deadline for capital applications is noon on 19th December. Schools should have completed a 3-4 week consultation prior to submission, or contact the DfE if this has not been possible.
- Understand that further rounds will be made available – schools are encouraged to submit an expression of interest by 12th December for future round.
- Report noted – any queries to be forwarded directly to fran.butler@devon.gov.uk

6. SW Norse Update

- DMP and VA Promise scheme numbers remain stable
- Service Term Contractor performance was reviewed.
- Some individual feedback has been provided where there have been specific concerns, with recommendations around improved communications with schools, resourcing of the contracts and pricing strategies in quotations.
- Noted anomalies around recording of lift servicing. It is apparent that the servicing has been completed, but administration is not updating activity on C2. This will be followed up formally.
- Contract management is challenging, however with support from Procurement colleagues it is hopeful that the situation will improve. A dedicated contract engineer, Danny O'Driscoll, has been appointed to oversee this.
- It would be helpful if schools to provide feedback to the Built Environments Team where there are concerns around servicing, quotations and on-site activity. This information will help to inform performance conversations with contractors.
- Schools were asked to provide updates on C2 if works have been undertaken

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 3 December 2024

ACTION:

- **DSLS** to ask schools to provide feedback to Katherine.Crompton@devon.gov.uk Built Environments Team where there are concerns around arranging servicing visits, reasonable quotations and on-site / follow up activity.

7. School Organisation Update

- Noted arrangements for ensuring Ofsted registration for 0-2 year old provision where a school age range is extended to include 9-month old children in nursery classes.
- The DfE has been asked for further information around the lifting of a statutory process for lowering the age range.
- Devon Education Forum had raised a query around falling demographics in primary schools. Shona confirmed that the strategic planning team had previously offered visits to local learning communities. Mindful that emerging local plan arrangements and development may require updates since the data was compiled 18 months ago.
- SOCA was keen that schools are kept up to date with new areas of development, particularly in rural areas. There were concerns that messaging from East Devon District Council around available places in schools do not seem to align with current numbers in schools.
- Review and update of the local area data to be considered.
- Castlebridge Special School to open in Tavistock prior to permanent site opening in Ivybridge in Sept 2026, when the Tavistock Hub will remain as a satellite provision.
- 0-11 age range to be consulted on at Shaldon primary.
- Update on Honiton CC sixth form and Clyst Vale CC sixth form closures consultations were noted.
- Noted situation at Boasley Cross age range amendment through a Deed of Variation.
- Noted that Deeds of Variation for Chagford and St James' Primaries in Dartmoor MAT had been implemented in error by DfE with no consultation. Retrospective significant change Business Plans requested by Regions Group.
- SOCA noted organisation updates on other schools and MATs within the report.
- Children's Scrutiny Committee review of LA function to consult and engage around school relocations and closures. Governance Review to consider how elected members may have oversight of the process in future. Mindful of concerns that statutory timelines could be missed if Children's Scrutiny are involved in proposals, particularly where Cabinet remains the decision making body.
- Updated overview of new schools across the county was provided.
- Noted planned withdrawal of DfE Academisation support grant from 1 Jan 2025.
- Noted updates on current academy conversions, which has seen a considerable slow-down

ACTION:

- **SM** to request review and update of Local Learning Community area data.

8. Capital Programme Update

- Update on capital maintenance scheme and reactive works to be circulated

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 3 December 2024

- Additional £2.1bn announced for school maintenance nationally. However, forecasting next year's allocation based on current funding methodology
- Still awaiting an update on School Condition Surveys from DfE.
- Updates were provided on current capital schemes including Castlebridge (Tavistock) and Cranbrook Cobdens. Some feasibility on s.106 underway.
- Surveys have been circulated to all schools re. solar panels, and to maintained schools re. school condition survey. Schools encouraged to respond to the surveys to inform work programme within Built Environments Team, to improve accuracy of locally held data on the condition of Devon's schools, and reducing the number of reactive and ad-hoc work not planned into the programme. Deadline extended for response.
- Procurement regulations to be introduced in February 2025. ESFA e-learning available to support schools with procurement strategies. Quality, as well as cost, will take a more prominent role within the new Act.
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ACTION:

- **DSLS** to remind schools to respond to the surveys to inform work programme within Built Environments Team. Deadline extended for response.

9. AOB

- Admissions consultation ongoing into the new year (10 January). Determination must then take place within statutory timelines and the Diocese informed where appropriate.
- Schools were reminded to review the admissions policy, proposed PANs and proposed changes to schools in the local area. It is the local admission authority responsibility to ensure that their own arrangements are on the school website.

ACTION:

- **DSLS** to remind schools to review Schools were reminded to review the admissions policy, proposed PANs and proposed changes.

Future meeting dates (All 09.30 – 11.30 via Teams):

- **Tuesday 4 March 2025**
- **Tuesday 20 May 2025**
- **Tuesday 23 September 2025**
- **Tuesday 2 December 2025**
- **Tuesday 3 March 2026**