

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025

Key Items for DEF to note:

Item 2: Determined Admission Arrangements 2026/27 & Admissions Arrangements 2027/8

- SOCA noted the statutory timetables for schools to consult on and determine their admissions policies. Schools are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the timeframes and ensure arrangements are in place to ensure compliance.
- Noted that where there are changes to catchment areas resulting in overlap with another school, the LA will recognise only one school per address for the purposes of school transport entitlement.
- Timetable provided for the next round of admissions policy proposal / consultation / determination

Item 3: Delayed Admission to Secondary School

- Delayed transfer requests to secondary school should be discussed well in advance of transition to enable options to be considered by the primary school, secondary schools and families.
- Where a child has an EHCP, any discussion about the child's education and transition arrangements should include colleagues from the SEN Statutory Team.

Item 5: SW Norse Update

- Schools are encouraged to provide feedback on maintenance contractor service performance on school sites through Mike.Burlace@norsegroup.co.uk and Katherine.crompton@devon.gov.uk to enable information to be fed back to procurement informing contract management and provide support to schools.

Item 6: School Organisation Update

- SOCA noted updated data on small schools which will be shared with Heads by Local Learning Community.
- SOCA noted vulnerabilities particularly around increased number of very small schools (now six schools) with no preferences for admission into Reception in Sept 25. DCC looking at options around building capacity through initiatives such as nursery provision.
- Term dates for 2026/7 and 2027/8 to be recommended for approval by Cabinet.

Item 7: School Capital Programme

- Devon is expecting an uplift in the 2025/26 School Condition Allocation for capital maintenance, however no details have yet been issued by the DfE.
- Built Environment Team survey has been sent to maintained schools in autumn term. The responses have informed BET decisions around prioritising maintenance works, and providing feedback to the national forum. An up to date, accurate view of school condition and can help the team to better support school leaders to manage their site.
- Further replies are sought from schools who have not yet responded.

Attendance

DCC

Katherine Crompton (Chair)

Shona Meek

Andrew Brent

Fran Butler (**apologies**)

Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)

Capital Programme Manager, Built Environments

Senior School Organisation Officer

Senior Policy Officer

Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Lead

Service Support Officer (E&L)

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025

Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary

Penny Hammett
David Perkins

FORT Federation
Littletown Academy

Secondary

Representative TBC

Special School Heads

Nicola Jones
Stuart Allman

Orchard Manor School
Pathfield School

DAG

Ian Rogers

Diocesan Representatives

Kirsty Wright
Christina Mabin - *part*
Richard Power - *part*

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

Union Representative

Caroline Harding (*apologies*)

Joint Secretary, NASUWT

In Attendance

Nick Cook - *part*

South West Norse

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 3 December 2024

Outstanding actions:

- AB confirmed that Anycomms notifications are sent to schools when there is an in-year admission to be reviewed on portal.
- CME and EHE policies were endorsed at January Devon Education Forum meeting.
- Local Learning Community area data has been reviewed and shared with a few schools, and will be shared more widely with LLCs in due course.
- All other actions complete or in hand
- Minutes agreed as an accurate record

ACTION:

- Flexi-schooling guidance to be provided to schools by **Andrew Brent**
- **DSLS** to request again that further headteacher representative volunteers come forward, particularly from North and West Devon to sit on Fair Access Panel.

2. Admissions: Determined Admission Arrangements 2026/27 and Admissions Arrangements for 2027/8

- Schools must confirm with LA and Diocese by 15 March that they have determined their admission arrangements for 2026/27
- Noted some amendments have been made to the normal admissions round scheme.

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025

- SOCA noted changes to own admission authority schools' policies for 2026/27 e.g. increases in PAN, introduction of priority for children at a school run nursery and introduction of an admissions priority catchment area
- Policies for 2027/28 will be drafted over summer break – schools wishing to incorporate any changes should contact Andrew.brent@devon.gov.uk. These policies should be considered by local governing boards in the autumn term and ensure that the policies and any proposed changes are clearly communicated with families, on the website and with local schools.
- SOCA noted the statutory timetables for schools to consult on and determine their admissions policies.
- Thanks were expressed to Andrew Brent for the preparation and support with policy around admissions and catchment areas. SOCA appreciated the close working relationship between the LA and the Diocese to ensure Devon schools' admissions practice is fully compliant.
- Noted that where there are changes to catchment areas resulting in overlap with another school, the LA will recognise only one school per address for the purposes of school transport entitlement.

3. Admissions: Delayed Admission to Secondary School

- SOCA received data on children with EHCPs being taught outside of their chronological age group in primary, often following delayed admission to primary school (e.g. summer born children, SEN needs).
- Delayed transfer requests to secondary school should be discussed well in advance of transition to enable options to be considered by the primary school, secondary schools and families.
- Primary schools will be notified individually of children affected and asked to discuss with parents and secondary school.
- Secondary schools consider requests for continuing education outside of chronological age group on a case by case basis, in compliance with the Admissions Code.
- Where a child has an EHCP, any discussion about the child's education and transition arrangements should include colleagues from the SEN Statutory Team.

4. Early Years Update

- SOCA noted the update in Fran Butler's absence.
- Any queries to be followed up with fran.butler@devon.gov.uk

5. SW Norse Update

- Performance of service term contractors has shown improvement, with 94% compliance currently.
- Air Conditioning and Heating contractor has been in discussion with SW Norse and is now in the process of taking on new resource to manage the servicing elements of the contract to improve timeframes, particularly for repairs where parts can be complex to source. SOCA members also reported that their experience has improved recently.
- Norse working more closely with other contractors to ensure improvement of quality and delivery timescales
- Norse currently assessing with contractors how much plant within the schools estate is currently non-operational. Typically this seems to be relating to boilers or lifts.

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025

- Norse currently looking at contractor requests for inflationary uplift for the new financial year. Noted that some contractors looking requesting above the standard BCIS percentage uplift.
- Mindful that schools will need to be contacted shortly regarding the 25/26 premium for VA Promise and this uplift will need to be considered to enable schools to budget for additional costs.
- Devon is in the market to renew Maintenance Panel Agreement (MPA) to provide a broader supply chain.
- Schools are encouraged to provide feedback on maintenance contractor service performance on school sites through daniel.odriscoll@norsegroup.co.uk and Katherine.crompton@devon.gov.uk to enable information to be fed back to procurement informing contract management and provide support to schools when they encounter issues.

ACTION:

- **RP & NC** to liaise regarding providing schools with appropriate notice of rising maintenance agreement costs, and the number of VA Promise schools which may be converting to Academy and therefore leaving the scheme during the year.
- **PN/DP** to highlight to school leaders at DSLS Briefing:
 - the request to complete the BET condition survey and
 - to provide feedback to Norse and BET on contractor service experience.

6. School Organisation Update

- SOCA noted updated data on small schools, including cohort numbers, based on September 24 school census, admissions preferences for September 25 and NHS data for future cohorts. Mindful of variances around migration and parental preferences.
- There has been little shift in the number of schools with under 50 on roll and slightly more schools with under 100 on roll.
- Noted vulnerabilities around increased number of very small schools (now six schools) which have received no preference for admission into Reception in Sept 25. DCC looking at options around building capacity through initiatives such as nursery provision as well as continuing to support formal partnership and collaboration.
- The data will be shared in LLC groups with Heads. It was felt that sharing data on small schools under 50 would be helpful to Heads affected to understand the broader picture across the county.
- SOCA felt that this information was helpful to provide context across localities.
- Term dates for 2026/7 and 2027/8 to be recommended for approval by Cabinet.
- DfE Funding agreement for new Castlebridge School has been entered into with Special Partnership Trust.
- SOCA noted school proposals to extend age ranges.
- The LA has committed to a governance review around Member involvement in school organisation processes for school relocations and closures which will be reported back to SOCA in due course.
- Noted new legislation now in force which simplifies process to establish nursery provision in maintained schools. However a non-statutory process is still required including full and fair consultation and obtaining necessary consents from the Diocese, where relevant, and support from the LA to ensure proposal is in line with wider place planning arrangements.
- Fran Butler (fran.butler@devon.gov.uk) and Shona Meek (shona.meek@devon.gov.uk) are both able to fully support schools with the process.

Schools Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group: Notes of meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025

- SOCA noted the update on academy conversions.

ACTION:

- **SM** to ensure data is shared with LLC groups
- SM to ensure data is shared with small schools to provide broader context

7. Capital Programme Update

- Devon is expecting an uplift in the 2025/26 School Condition Allocation for capital maintenance, however no details have yet been issued by the DfE.
- No further information around Special School Net Capacity Assessments – tool has not yet been published though NCAs are coming through from the DfE NCA teams.
- Capital Programme 2025/26 will include some works that could not be included in the 24/25 programme for a variety of reasons.
- Looking at average 4% inflation and an increase of up to 20% in tender costs over the next 5 years which impacts on how far the budget will stretch to address capital works in school buildings
- Alexander Centre project development is progressing and is currently out to tender to refurbish the building for Castlebridge School Hub opening in September 25.
- Ongoing uncertainty around new special school project in Cranbrook. Understand this is impacting on LAs across the country with the Free School Programme under review by the DfE.
- Noted the responses from the Built Environment Team survey to schools initially shared in autumn term; 43% of maintained schools have responded to share their view of the condition of their buildings.
- These responses inform BET decisions around prioritising maintenance works, and providing feedback to the national forum. Up to date, accurate view of school condition and can help the team to support school leaders to manage their site.
- BET discussing possibility of increasing quinquennial inspections from 5 to 3-yearly.
- New Procurement Act came into effect on 24 February 2024:
- E learning is available providing an update on the [new Transforming Public Procurement \(TPP\) e-learning available](#) for procurement practitioners in schools and multi-academy trusts.
[Get help buying for schools - a free procurement service for schools and multi-academy trusts - Get help buying for schools](#)

ACTION:

- **PH/DP** to ask remaining maintained schools to respond to the BET survey through newsletter and School Leadership Briefing.

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

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