

Report of the Cabinet Member: Children, Schools and Skills

I have been asked to report, by Councillors Hannaford and Hannan, as follows;

..... on action being taken to support West Exe School in the continuing absence of the Head Teacher, to ensure it continues to operate effectively; and

..... On the Council's position with regard to the Children and Social Work Bill, in particular its intention to grant local authorities the power to exempt themselves from children's social care legislation, and its reaction to the views of social workers as represented by UNISON in its recent survey.

West Exe School

The school was judged to be a good school by Ofsted in January 2014. Inspectors said the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, exceeded the national average. Students felt safe and their behaviour was good.

Governors appointed a new Headteacher in April 2015 and standards overtime became low compared to pupils at similar schools nationally. In May 2015 exclusions from the school became a significant concern with West Exe School permanently excluding a higher number of students compared to secondary schools in Devon. In September 2015, the school started receiving additional intensive support and closer monitoring to accelerate their improvements. In February 2016 Uffculme School were asked to take on a support role and a number of teachers were supported by the Local Authority to improve their teaching. The new head continued to receive support from a mentor.

A new chair of governors was appointed in October 2015 and a National Leader of Governance (NLG) was attached to the school in November 2015, by the Local Authority, to further support and strengthen the governing body. In spring 2016 the school was ranked 46/55 by the Department for Education and a formal letter of concern was issued to the school by Devon County Council. There have been termly evaluation visits by the school improvement team and half termly meetings to monitor progress and identify further support and action. A number of staff left but strong replacements were recruited.

Evaluation visits continued to show concern for the slow pace of improvement and in July 2016 Devon County Council issued a Formal Warning Notice. The governors asked the Headteacher of Uffculme School, who is a National Leader of Education, to act as Executive Headteacher. In October 2016 the Headteacher resigned and his deputy became acting head with the Headteacher of Uffculme School retaining the Executive Headteacher role.

The governing body, over the course of the last few months, had applied to the Department for Education and the Regional Schools Commissioner to join the Ted Wragg Trust as a sponsored academy. The governors have recently heard from the Regional Schools Commissioner that they are happy with the school embarking on the process of

becoming part of the Ted Wragg Trust. This is subject to final approval by the Regional Schools Commissioner but in principal approval has been given. The Ted Wragg Trust mission is to deliver the best educational experiences to all Exeter children. One of their schools, Isca Academy, has just been judged good in all areas by Ofsted and the report acknowledged the excellent leadership provided by the trust. A second Trust school, St James, is now one of the most successful schools in Devon.

The Ted Wragg Trust is keen to support West Exe as quickly as possible and the governors of the Ted Wragg Trust and St James School have committed to release their current Headteacher. It was agreed with the West Exe School governors that he will be the interim Headteacher at West Exe School from January 2017 whilst the process of joining the Ted Wragg Trust continues. West Exe School will continue to receive additional support through the Local Authority school improvement team. Staff involved will include a recently retired Headteacher from an outstanding Devon secondary school, maths, English and science advisers and other support where appropriate.

The Local Authority and governors in consultation with our School Improvement service agree that the process outlined above will provide the school with the support and direction it needs in order to secure the necessary improvement and ensure pupils at the school have access to high quality, inclusive education.

Children and Social Work Bill.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to update Council on the Children and Social Work Bill.

The Bill sparked a lively debate across the profession and across politics, which is a good thing. This is a serious matter and merits attention.

You will see in my letter to the Minister that I have taken quite an independent position, somewhat at odds with the government's plans. Devon expects me to speak on behalf of vulnerable children in Devon, without fear or favour, and this is what I have done.

I am aware that my position has the support of some, for example the ex chair of the Devon Improvement Board, Professor Ray Jones and not of others, for example the Chief Social Worker, Isabelle Trowler. I welcome the expression of all views and the serious debate that is underway. If Unison happens to agree with me, all to the good; and if they don't, so be it.

I have listened to the frontline in Devon and to the senior officers whose job it is to advise me.

I was pleased with the Minister's reply. He has taken seriously our views and, while he doesn't necessarily agree with everything we have put forward, he has outlined a thoughtful and considered position. I am someone who welcomes change and supports innovation and therefore I welcome the government's appetite to use innovation to further drive improvement in the lives of vulnerable children. However I am also mindful and cautious of risks of un-intended consequences and of the some of the limitations of structural reforms.

What I can say is that whatever the final outcome of the political and professional debate, here in Devon, we will continue to deliver with energy, commitment and purpose, ensuring that our focus on children is unwavering.

If you would like to see the full correspondence, you can do so via the following links, or you can ask Jo Olsson's office (hannah.washington-jo@devon.gov.uk) to send you a copy

Link to the letter from Councillor McInnes to the DfE –

https://devoncc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/hannah_washington-jo_devon_gov_uk/_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?guestaccesstoken=9enJPHccLJ%2bGIO5L%2baX2EhfFU1M%2bXxQ9palsZJiEA1s%3d&docid=08cbc22d95276466397f3b65aebe0bf05&rev=1

Link to the letter from the DfE to Councillor McInnes –

https://devoncc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/hannah_washington-jo_devon_gov_uk/_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?guestaccesstoken=jlOhgl1s8N75ZNgCwomvNws4rsaOn36Qe56ZTz7FY7E%3d&folderid=2_0d7cd9ed74ab743929e3b323284d04c21&rev=1

**Councillor James McInnes
Cabinet Member for
Children, Schools and Skills**