

DEVON EDUCATION FORUM

20 March 2024

Present:-

Schools Members

Primary Headteachers

Mrs R Saim	Cedar Tree Federation
Mr C Tribble	Honiton Primary
Mr D Perkins	Honiton Littleton Primary (Academy) Substitute

Primary Governors

Mrs J Larcombe	Tiverton, The Castle
Ms N Warner	Newton Abbot, Decoy

Secondary Headteachers

Ms J Fossey	West Exe School, Ted Wragg MAT (Academy)
Mr G Hill	Pilton CC, Ventrus MAT (Academy) Substitute
Mr R Gammon	Ottery St Mary, King's School (Academy) Sub

Secondary Governors

Mr A Hines	Education SW Trust (Academy)
Mr A Walmsley	The Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

Nursery School

Mrs S Baker	Westexe
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Special Headteacher

Mr K Bennett	Marland School
Ms S Pickering	Mill Water School (observing)

Special Governor

Mrs F Butler	Marland School (Chair)
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Alternative Provision

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Non-Schools Members

Mr B Blythe	PETROC, 16-19
Mrs B Alderson	Teachers Consultative Committee (TCC)
Ms S Williams	RC Diocesan Schools, Plymouth (Faith), non-voting

Observer

Councillor A Leadbetter	Cabinet Member – Children's Services and Skills
Councillor L Samuel	Cabinet Member – SEND Improvement Services

Apologies

Mr G Chown
Mr P Walker

Ventrus MAT (Academy)
First Federation Trust (Academy)

Ms K Brimacombe
Mr P Elliott
Ms G Sanders

Whitchurch Primary, First Fed'n (Academy)
Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust
Athena Learning Trust (Academy)

Ms F Bowler
Mrs S Crook
Mr P Randall

Braunton Academy
Tiverton High, Federation of Tiverton Schools
Exeter St Peter's CE Aided, Substitute

Ms H Brown
Ms S Lockwood
Ms G Rolstone

RC Diocesan Schools, Plymouth (Faith)
Exeter Diocesan Board of Education (Faith) Sub
Early Years, Private & Voluntary Independent

122 **Declarations of Interest**

Over and above any general interest arising from being a teacher or governor of a school, there were no interests declared.

123 **Minutes**

DECISION:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 be signed as a correct record.*

*note list of Members Present: Ms J Fossey, Secondary Headteacher, West Exe School, Ted Wragg MAT (Academy) and Mr B Blythe, PETROC 16-19, to be added. Ms Bowler and Mr Hill listed, were Secondary Headteachers of Braunton Academy and Pilton CC, Ventrus MAT (Academy) respectively. Ms Larcombe listed, was a primary maintained governor, Tiverton, The Castle.

124 **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting and Report back on Issues Raised with Cabinet/f40**

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125 **Membership**

DISCUSSION:

The Chairman welcomed Ms N Warner, primary maintained governor, to her first meeting.

126 Deputy Director and Head of Education Update

DISCUSSION:

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/24/07) on:-

(a) Attendance and Exclusions: Devon schools data, together with DfE guidance 2024 on improving attendance which would become statutory in September 2024.

The Interim Deputy Director and Head of Education highlighted (in summary) that:-

- Devon's persistent absenteeism (missing 10%+ sessions) was slightly higher than national, regional and statistical neighbours, as well as giving the picture for overall and severe absenteeism. Local data to date indicated an improving Devon picture but with more work to do. Devon Free School Meals pupils, Pupil Premium and disadvantaged pupils were at most risk of persistent absenteeism. Apart from pupil outcomes, there was a significant safeguarding concern, with the DfE guidance clear this was a multi-agency issue;

-Devon LA was well placed to respond to the new DfE requirements, but continuing to refine its work, expecting all schools to sign up and share attendance data within the DfE portal which gave live time data analysis, a fresh strategy and implementation. The DfE guidance referenced the National Children's Commissioner's recommendations which would inform the next phase. The DfE was also expecting Multi Academy Trusts to have low absenteeism before they could develop and expand further;

-Permanent Exclusion and Suspension rates remained higher than pre-pandemic both nationally and in Devon. Further Devon analysis was underway. Free School Meals and SEN Support pupils were significantly more likely to have permanent exclusion. Devon LA was planning to work with schools to establish a pilot aiming for zero exclusions; and

-Elective Home Education (EHE) had spiked both nationally and in Devon however this had now plateaued in Devon. Whilst Devon was tracking these pupils (indicating that Key stage 3 contained the largest number of EHE pupils), mental health was now the main reason reported for EHE, but safeguarding and assisting pupils to return to school remained a concern.

Members comments included:-

- a request that special schools data be reported in the same way and detail as mainstream schools data, but with contextual / benchmarked to the special school sector and SEND sub-sectors;

-concern that in following up pupil absenteeism and EHE, the highest number was amongst the most vulnerable pupils; and

-further data on managed move pupils would be welcomed.

(b) Additionally, there was an update on Ofsted's findings in Devon and recent Ofsted activity in Devon. Devon was performing marginally better than nationally, particularly in primary, however special schools were achieving better than nationally in relation to Ofsted outcomes (and higher than reported).

DECISION:

That Report (DEF/24/07) be noted, together with Members' requests in (a) above.

ACTION:

Interim Deputy Director and Head of Education (Ceri Morgan) - (a) above, special school and managed moves data.

127 **Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Programme Update**

DISCUSSION:

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/24/08) on performance of SEN statutory processes and key updates on sufficiency and placement value.

The SEND Strategic Director (Interim) reported on (in summary);-

-the in depth whole system review, including costings of processes and efficiency. This commenced in October 2023 to address three Ofsted issues (i.e. timeliness of statutory Plans; communications with families and the quality of Plans). There had been steady improvement to front end EHCP outcomes since April 2023 however there was still significant improvement required for families to feel a difference;

-sufficiency work had identified a significant shortage in resource base provision in Devon, a key pressure with LAs in this position more likely to need to commission high cost places from independent specialist providers. Devon LA planned to establish an additional 200 resource base places in the

next five years. The remaining special school building programme continued to focus on increased places for children with specific SEND needs;

-a capital funding bid to DfE (as part of the Safety Valve proposals) supported plans for a further 300+ FE places and an improved SEND offer.

In response to Members' comments and questions the SEND Strategic Director (Interim) advised that:-

-there were a number of practices other LAs were adopting to achieve better SEND provision, including:- better education support offer for schools, Early Help and early intervention; the statutory SEND route was flooded in Devon as there was a perception that there was not an alternative good offer; links to Devon's exclusion and attendance with a lot of SEND pupils not in school; other LAs support offer pre-statutory stage. Inconsistencies in provision in Devon schools across the county had been identified and school visits carried out. The LA and schools' role, traded and core offers were being looked at holistically;

-Devon's 7% statutory completion rate was indicative of a system problem with excessive demand, with more pre-statutory provision needed;

-the Director would look into SEND provision/any correlations of other LAs in a similar funding position and report back;

-the recognition of some positive data and excellent practice (e.g. special school outreach work);

-the demand from parents for statutory offers and referrals to tribunals were unlikely to significantly decrease until Devon's processes were effective; and

-each pupil's needs would continue to be individually assessed, with no broad brush approach to reduce costs.

DECISION:

(a) that the update on performance related to SEN Statutory Processes be noted;

(b) the update on key strands of Devon's SEND Transformation Programme be noted; and

(c) that a Report arising from the SEND practices of other LAs in a similar funding position to Devon be made to the next meeting.

ACTION:

SEND Strategic Director (Interim) (Kellie Knott) - (c) report to next meeting.

128 **Finance**

DISCUSSION:

a **Schools Finance Group (SFG) Minutes**

The Forum considered the minutes of the SFG meeting held on 6 March 2024 (also considered in relation to other finance reports within the agenda).

Also available at [Schools Finance Group \(SFG\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/schools-finance-group-sfg-education-and-families)

DECISION:

That the minutes of the Schools Finance Group (SFG), 6 March 2024 be received.

b **High Needs Funding Sub Group Minutes**

DECISION:

That the minutes of the High Needs Funding Sub Group, 4 March 2024 be received.

c **Finance Update**

DISCUSSION:

The Forum considered the joint Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/24/09), regarding:-

Month 10 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget monitoring position;
DSG Management Plan;
High Needs;
Safety Valve staffing investment;
Workstream Savings;
Impact of cost reduction on overall Deficit;
Capital investment; and
Risks.

-The Month 10 outturn forecast for 2023/24 showed a significant overspend in the overall DSG of £40.9m associated with the continued demand on High Needs after taking into account management actions savings of £7.9 million identified in the current Safety Valve Intervention management plan;

- The Management Action of £20.2m reflected budgeted savings expected to be delivered in 2023/24, as per the current Safety Valve submission to the DfE. As at Month 10, £14.6m was identified as at risk of not being delivered due to either delays in projects or not proceeding;

-An additional £2.3 million independent sector savings had been identified from 3-5 year placements ending and Adult Social Care contribution;

-The DSG Adjustment Account was projected to rise to £167.6 million by the end of 2023/24;

-A high level of requests for EHCP referrals continued (7.8% increase on same period last year). The number of requests being refused at 6 weeks decreased by 0.35% and 16 weeks increased by 8.35%. Although refusals were higher in 2023/24, due to the increased number of requests being received, the number of plans being agreed and issued were rising, with no volume reduction in EHCPs. Support from schools was required to take action to mitigate the growing demand;

-The increasing DSG deficit could have a considerable impact on future education budgets within the DSG as well as impacting on the financial sustainability for Devon County Council.

In response to Member comments, Officers advised that:-

-a response from the DfE regarding the proposed Safety Valve for Devon was still awaited;

-the trend on management actions was influenced on previous measures taken, but next year would be based on current measures.

DISCUSSION:

(a) that month 10 DSG monitoring position as set out in Report (DEF/24/09) be noted; and

(b) that the current Safety Valve / DSG management plan position as set out in the Report be noted.

ACTION:

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129 Standing (and other) Groups

The Forum received the following from its standing and other groups (excepting Schools' Finance Group (SFG) minutes and High Needs Funding Sub Group, considered under Finance minute above):-

(a) Standing Groups
School Organisation, Capital and Admissions (SOCA)

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024.

Also available at
[School Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group \(SOCA\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/education-and-families/soca)

(b) Other Groups

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130 **Dates of Future Meetings**

Meetings at 10am. Please check venue/arrangements
<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Wednesday 19 June 2024
Wednesday 20 Nov 2024
Wednesday 22 Jan 2025
Wednesday 19 March 2025.

NOTES:

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.05 am