

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2008

PRESENT: -

School Members: Nick Capstick, Primary Headteacher
Lauren Connor, Primary Headteacher
Chris Davies, Primary Headteacher
Debbie Kalynka, Primary Headteacher
Terri Menham, Primary Headteacher
David Easter, Primary Governor
Steve Flavin, Secondary Headteacher
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Peter Wells, Secondary Headteacher
Kevin Gray, Secondary Governor
Bob Walker, Special Headteacher

Non-School Members: Sally Inskip, Diocese Representative
Debbie Waldron, Early Years Representative

Officers: Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision), Martin Coles (Director Quality and Standards), Geoff Hogg (Director of Services to Children and Young People), Sue Wald (Director Strategy and Commissioning), Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager Children Services), Lorraine Billis (Deputy Group Finance Manager - Schools), Nikki Soave (Principal Auditor), Anne Mackay (Finance), Patrick Weir (Transformation Team), Mandy Wishart (HR Business Partner), Kerry Davison (School Meals Project Manager), John Holmes and Stephanie Coward (Capita).

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Boyles (Primary Governor) and Phil Baker (Trade Union Representative).

20. Announcement

The Chair advised members that this would be the last meeting attended by Lorraine Billis (Deputy Group Finance Manager - Schools). She thanked her both on a personal level and on behalf of all past and present members of the Forum for her help and enormous contribution to the work of the Forum.

21. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2007 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

22. Feedback from Meeting on 1 November 2007

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children to provide feedback on the recommendations made at the

previous meeting.

Mandy Wishart (HR Business Partner) informed members of the current practice for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and also advised that consultation was taking place on a new process that was to be introduced from September 2008. The Chair enquired why the procedure in Swindon was more complicated than the Department for Children Schools and Families requirements. Members gave specific examples of anomalies that had arisen and raised the following points:

- There is a national education system but it is not possible to accept another authority's clearance.
- A teacher can be engaged through an agency to work in school, but the same school cannot permanently appoint that teacher until CRB clearance has been given.
- Unable to transfer CRB clearance between schools in Swindon.
- Who is responsible when a child attends at a different location for specific courses or when out in the work place on work experience?

Ian Bickerton stressed the importance of ensuring that every precaution was taken in this very sensitive area but would be happy for a further review to take place. The Forum stated that a more common-sense approach was needed and Ian Bickerton and Mandy Wishart agreed to consider the points that had been made in the review process. Further information would be submitted to the April meeting but in the meantime, further guidance would be circulated to the schools via the head teachers associations (SASH, SAPH, ASSH).

In addition to the full School Forum meeting on 1 November 2007, a Sub-Group meeting on 13 December 2007 was attended by Nicky Soave (Principal Auditor) in respect of the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS). A timetable for assessments had been drawn up and this was circulated for member's information. Rachael Matthey (Secondary Headteacher) commented that Isambard Community School was scheduled during the summer period, whereas it had been agreed that an autumn visit would be made. Ms Soave confirmed that the timing would be changed.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Local Provision in conjunction with the HR Business Partner submit a further report to the April meeting regarding Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and prior to that date, circulate further guidance to schools via the head teachers associations (SASH, SAPH, ASSH).

(3) That, subject to the change of timing for Isambard Community School, the provisional timetable for the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS) visits be endorsed.

23. Swindon Capita Partnership, Services to Schools

Patrick Weir (Transformation Team) presented a report by the Group Director Business Transformation, to provide an update on the performance of services to schools delivered in partnership with Capita. He introduced John Holmes, Operations Director for the Swindon Capita Partnership who wanted to know how the schools wished to work with Capita and the best method of providing feedback.

It was noted that the information given did not actually measure the specific services to schools. Members particularly commented on the low targets set and the

fact that they were frequently lower than the baseline figure. The Chair stated that headteachers had written to Capita setting out their dissatisfaction with areas of service but Mr Holmes confirmed that he had not seen the letter and asked that it be reissued directly to himself. It was suggested and agreed that Capita, in conjunction with the Director Quality and Standards, should work directly with the headteachers associations (SASH, SAPH and ASSH) regarding the monitoring of services and provide the Forum with an annual overview report on school issues, preferably at the first meeting of the academic year.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Transformation Team, in conjunction with Capita, submit an annual overview report on school issues to the School Forum at its first meeting in the academic year.

24. Schools Block Budget Monitoring 2007/8

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager - Children Services), on the latest budget monitoring information, to the end of November 2007, in respect of the Schools Budget for 2007/8.

Resolved - (1) That the 2007/08 financial projections in respect of the Schools Budget for the current financial year be noted.

(2) That the Group Director, Children continue rigorous and robust monitoring of the Schools Block budget and bring budget monitoring reports to future meetings of Schools Forum.

25. Reform of Early Years Funding

Geoff Hogg (Director Early Years and Pupil Services) presented a report by the Group Director Children setting out proposals for the reform of Early Years funding.

Resolved - (1) That the report be noted

(2) That officers undertake the work that is required next year on identifying a common approach to counting early years pupils and developing a single local funding formula, with regular reports being submitted to the Early Years Reference Group and the School Forum Sub Group.

26. 14-19 Diploma Provision 2008-2011

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Martin Coles (Director Quality and Standards), informing of the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) requirements for 14-19 Diploma provision from April 2008.

Resolved – (1) That the Forum recommends to the Local Authority that the Department for Children Schools and Families grant to fund the Diploma programme is paid to the 14-19 Partnership and subsequently devolved to schools on the basis of diploma registrations

(2) That the Forum recommends to the Local Authority that the relevant proportion of the co-ordination, management and other central costs of the 14-19 Partnership are borne by the participating schools.

(3) That the arrangements initially put in place be reviewed on an annual basis to assess whether any amendments are required.

Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager - Children Services) presented a report by the Group Director Children regarding the Schools Block budget for 2008-11. Ms Murray distributed a revised Appendix A to the report and also referred to the amended proposals regarding the School Lunch grant that had been circulated prior to the meeting.

It was noted that the report and proposals had already been considered by the Forum's Sub-Group at its meeting on 13 December 2007. Members then discussed the following specific points:

School Development Grant – queries were raised as to how the grant was distributed, what criteria was used, who carried out the process to select the appropriate schools and whether there was a way of addressing the imbalance that now arose. Ms Murray agreed to investigate the situation and advise members. In addition, it was stated that information on how the funding was made-up would be helpful.

School Lunch Grant – Kerry Davison (School Meals Project Manager) advised that the original proposals did not meet the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) requirements which was why the revised proposals had been put forward. Members were concerned at the additional work involved with the process but generally agreed the new proposals on the understanding that they could be reviewed after one year.

Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant – in view of the increasing number of pupils requiring assistance the amount involved seemed totally inadequate and ways of making best use of the funds were discussed. It was agreed that a small working group would consider how best to utilise the grant and submit proposals to the Forum for 2009/10.

Appendix A (revised) – this had been amended at the request of the Director of Finance. Rachael Matthey (Head, Isambard Community School) tabled a response disagreeing with the alterations made to the amounts allocated for set up costs for new schools. Isambard had already suffered from the delay in allocating the full set-up budget and now a further delay was being proposed, which was totally unacceptable.

Resolved - (1) That the Forum rejects the revised Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget set out in Appendix A distributed at the meeting. However, should the Director of Finance agree to reinstate the full set-up funding of £200,00 for Isambard in 2008/09, then officers are authorised to agree the DSG budget.

(2) That the distribution proposals for the School Lunch Grant, as set out in the revised Appendix C, paragraph 1.2 circulated prior to the meeting be agreed.

(3) That subject to the above, the proposals set out in the report and appendices be agreed.

(4) That the Group Finance Manager - Children Services make further enquiries regarding the School Development Grant, as detailed above, and inform members accordingly.

(5) That a small working group comprising of Nick Capstick, Steve Flavin and Sally Inskip be established to consider options for the best use of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant with proposals being submitted to the Forum for 2009/10.

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group

Director Children on the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) capital programme for schools 2008-2011.

Resolved – (1) That the report and the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) capital programme for schools 2008-2011 be noted.

(2) The Forum recommends to the Local Authority that it should continue with centralised funding for the South West Grid for Learning in relation to the new Harnessing Technology Grant, where the Local Authority must consult with the Schools Forum, and a further report be submitted to the next meeting when more information was available.

29. Schools Forum Membership

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children on proposed amendments to the legislation relating to membership and responsibilities of the Forum and seeking agreement to any changes in membership.

Members welcomed the fact that school members can nominate deputies and also that a representative need not be the head teacher but could be another member of the school senior management or leadership team. It was noted that non-school members would be increased to include a representative of the 14-19 Partnership but consideration of any further non-school members was left until a future date.

A chart setting out the powers and responsibilities of the School Forum was distributed for information.

Resolved – The Forum notes the proposed amendments to its responsibilities and recommends to the Local Authority that the membership be amended to include a representative of the 14-19 Partnership only from 2008 when the changes to legislation come into force, with the possibility of additional non-school members being considered at a later date.

30. Budget

Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager - Children Services) informed members that the budget was still subject to the Secretary of State's approval as the impact outside of the minimum funding guarantee affects more than 20% of schools. It was hoped to get notification within a week.

31. Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would take place on Tuesday, 29 April 2008 at 4.00 p.m.

Sally Inskip (Diocese) requested an item on ICT remote back up for the next meeting.