

## 'Working together: Academies and the local authority' Scrutiny Review 14 November 2012

Agenda Item	Page No
3 SUBMISSIONS TO REVIEW GROUP Public submissions attached	1 - 4



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE





**ACADEMIES AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY SCRUTINY REVIEW MEETING.  
14<sup>th</sup> November 2012.**

**Local Authority Responsibilities.**

These notes are submitted by the undersigned who are concerned about the potential decline in education choices and options for families in Bucks as a result of schools moving away from local authority control and administration.

Our primary concern is to ensure that the interests of parents and children are safeguarded when free schools are established and the county schools transfer to academy status. Although Local Authorities will have no direct supervision of academies and free schools, it is a fact that in the end, final responsibility for educational performance in the county rests with the Local Authority.

We see the local authority as having a critical role in understanding and promoting the interests of parents. In the new arrangements, the L.A. has to be the champion for parents and schoolchildren throughout the county.

Local Authorities must ensure that the county's parents have fair access to good schools in their locality. How education is delivered to children within the schools is the responsibility of the school staff. The Local Authority must exercise its responsibility to ensure that fair access is available for all children and that the expected educational standards are met. These requirements are in line with the Coalition Government's policies and as set out in the Secretary of State for Education's letter to local authorities.

The specific responsibilities for the LA are:

**School Admissions**

- The L.A has a strategic responsibility for school admission policies. Parents want a common admissions policy that is fair and consistently applied throughout the county.
- The L.A. must work with all schools to develop a common admissions policy to ensure fair, simple and objective admissions.
- The L.A. or an independent body acceptable to the L.A. should carry out the administration of school admission arrangements. Schools should be discouraged from administering their own admission arrangements.
- Where the L.A. has failed to obtain some schools' agreement to operate within a common admissions policy, it should ensure that the deviant schools' admission policies are published in a clear and understandable manner. Where appropriate the L.A. should provide support to families making school applications for schools that are not in the common admission arrangements.

**School Transport**

Ensure that school Transport arrangements are cost effective and convenient for families.

## Appeals

The LA should take on the responsibility to ensure that the L.A. or a competent independent body that has the confidence of parents conducts all appeals for school transfers and school selection.

## School performance

The LA should be responsible for:

- Monitoring school performances, intervening and offering support when expected standards are not being achieved.
- Ensuring schools' operations and policies are consistent with their funding agreements.
- Ensuring that the Pupil Premium received by schools is used *only* for the support of the disadvantaged children.

We are aware that at least one academy in the county has introduced a banding selection test. We are of the opinion that this highlights a real danger to a cohesive school admissions system within Bucks. If this precedent is adopted by other schools, parents and children will suffer. The L.A. must do what it can to encourage all maintained schools to co-operate not compete with each other. Co-operation is intended to be at the heart of the academy school system.

Derek Berry  
Trevor Fowler  
Molly Fowler  
John Bajina  
Linda Derrick

### **The Local Authority and Primary Academies.**

The government strategy is based on the concept that Schools were under the control of the local authority whereas in Buckinghamshire the relationship between the Authority and primary schools could be described as good in parts. On the whole the relationship with the education department was based on the provision of support but with the occasional dictat where the system was seen as requiring direction. The support from the rest of the organisation tended to be more troublesome with the Authority perceiving the schools as necessary but innocents abroad

With the arrival of academies, this relationship will need to change. The Academy is now the provider of an education service to a commissioner of education within the county. The new relationship is therefore 3 fold.

1. The Authority retains the responsibility for commissioning academies to provide a service to the community:
2. The Academy is a customer of the educational support service
3. The academy is a customer for a range of other services that have historically been provided by the authority.

### **The Authority as a Commissioner of Services**

The authority needs to establish a System Leadership Group not dissimilar to the School Place Planning Group and its predecessor the School Organisation Committee, but with a total system responsibility.

This group should be responsible for co-ordinating the provision of those services for which the Council retains responsibility and overseeing the delivery of the Commissioned Contracts.

Its work should be subject to the scrutiny of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee.

### **The Academy is a customer of the educational support service**

The proposed Trust will be a commercial organisation with all the difficulties that this condition will require. It will need to approach academies as its customers and think in commercial terms and focus on Customer Relationship Management.

On practice, whilst Academies could buy the Education Support Services from commercial organisations that are setting themselves up to provide such services, there is a level of “comfort” in using the services that are known that will probably encourage the use of the Trust Offerings in the short term. However, this “locked-in” arrangement is unlikely to be sufficient in the longer term and therefore any arrangements to maintain the relationship will need focus on customer retention. The concept of User Groups as exist within the IT and other “technical” industries would be a useful model to consider.

Such User groups are always voluntary but are generally well attended providing the supplier makes concerted efforts to make them interesting and informative.

It is generally unwise to try to mix two bodies that may appear to have similar interests but whose focus may be different and there is always the danger that the “Big Players” outweigh the smaller organisations. Therefore the Fair Access Groups being developed by the Secondary Academies, whilst may be appropriate for Primary Academies to be included in the short term, they are unlikely to satisfy the requirements of Primary Academies in the longer term.

What is required is a number of smaller bodies linked to established structures. The most probable grouping would be to base them on the areas covered by the Local Boards of the Children and Young People’s Trusts which would provide opportunities to link to other services being provided to children at a local level.

**The academy is a customer for a range of other services that have historically been provided by the authority.**

In this category, there is already much competition from commercial organisations although the quality of some of the services being offered has not yet been tested to any great extent.

However the attitude of some BCC Staff toward Primary Academies has not developed in line with the changes in the relationship and so far, our experience has not been positive.

This will be a developing Commercial Relationship which the other parts of the Authority will need to consider if the efforts of the Bucks Learning Trust in the education arena are not to be undermined.

### **Summary**

There are currently three Primary Academies and if the general UK trend is followed, the increase in this number will be slow and may well be conditioned by the numbers who are prepared to collaborate with each other in some form or another.

There are NNN primary schools in the County and it is extremely unlikely that it will be possible to get them into a single grouping unless the timing was very specifically targeted at achieving this effect. Even then it is unlikely to succeed.

There is unlikely to be a simple solution and to the issues facing the Authority in dealing with Primary Academies but as a guiding principle, it would be wiser to establish some form of grouping of the existing Primary Academies and to facilitate the development of User Groups to meet the needs of those Academies as they develop.