

**Peter Dwyer**  
**Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service**

**County Hall, Northallerton**  
**North Yorkshire, DL7 8AE**

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:** PD/MES

**Contact:** Peter Dwyer

Tel: 01609 532234

Fax: 01609 773756

E-mail: [marion.sadler@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:marion.sadler@northyorks.gov.uk)

Web: [www.northyorks.gov.uk](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk)

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**To: Headteachers/Chairs of Governors of all North Yorkshire Schools**



Dear Colleague

Hope this finds you and your staff looking forward to a really well deserved break over Xmas and the New Year. Please try and ensure that you make the most of that time. The unbridled optimism of great leadership is increasingly necessary but it can be wearing! – please restore batteries and find time for yourself family and friends rather than everyone else!

Whilst the Chief Inspector in his recent annual report took the opportunity to challenge performance in the North and specifically in Yorkshire and Humber, I can reassure that his comments were not focused on ourselves. There were welcome messages in his report particularly around ensuring the Education and Skills agenda has a higher profile in the devolution/Northern powerhouse debates. In North Yorkshire there is of course much more to be done but progress is being and has been made. Many questioned the achievability of our ambition to see all schools good or outstanding. They challenged not because it was not the right thing to do but because surely it was not deliverable. Yet we have seen an increase locally that is double the national rate of improvement for North Yorkshire schools being good or outstanding which takes us to 86% of primary pupils and 80% for secondary pupils. We know behind that lies the quality of your leadership both individually and collectively. Joint practice development and collaborative improvement, in so many forms, is making a significant difference. I also hope you share my view that the LA and its school improvement service, in particular, is playing a full and positive role on that shared journey.

The challenge remains of finding ways to recognise and release expertise and capacity for the greater good. The Comprehensive Spending Review in November saw the Chancellor protecting many things but not LAs. This was not news to us locally and the announcements were consistent with the planning assumptions we have been working to for the coming period. We are not anticipating that the spending review will trigger additional cuts to local services you value.

His announcements on potential significant cuts to the Education Services Grant may well impact on both LAs and academies but the Council is clear the reduction is an issue for the Council and not specifically for children's services. The announcement came with that repeated language of freeing schools from LA control and the movement to a fully academised school system by 2020. Interestingly, we met with a successful MAT recently which has a far more managerial style than any LA I have worked in, directing and controlling the use of resources, the deployment of staff, the teaching methods used and most curriculum content across its group. They have done well and improved outcomes as a result. I would just rather the language was more balanced. There are some excellent MATs, there are some very good LAs, freedoms and perceived autonomies from we "bureaucrats" may not always be available or appropriate in some new organisational forms.

I am very concerned that the Chancellor's announcements, without a clear timeline, may create an added sense of urgency and possibly undue haste in the deliberations of individual schools. The desire to control one's own destiny is understandable and admirable but all, at the same time, are keen to ensure we retain an important focus on place/locality and avoid unhealthy unplanned fragmentation. We know from our discussions with the Regional Schools Commissioner that there is not the capacity in existing academy trusts to cope with significant expansion. Let us collectively reflect on the Green Paper expected in the New Year. We will certainly be keen to work with schools, and through the Education Partnership, to develop and champion coherent structural options/solutions. It cannot make sense to see towns where secondary schools are part of different Academy Trusts, with head offices distant from the local area, when a joined up quality alternative could have been created. I would welcome your initial thoughts and I am keen to open this discussion at Secondary SIN and Primary Leadership Network meetings and through the Education Partnership in the Spring Term.

There were positive words in the spending review about moving for 2017/18 to a fairer funding system for schools. Considerable pressure through the F40 group of which we are active members and a large number of national and local Members has driven this response. Again we expect consultation in the New Year but at least the commitment to an implementation date which should benefit North Yorkshire must be welcomed.

At a time of inevitable reflection it is also good to reflect on just some other key achievements in our children and young people's work in the county:

- Whilst only formed in April we now have a Prevention Service provided targeted work with over 2600 individual children and families – more capacity for targeted engagement than ever before and at least 25% of those involvements initiated by schools
- Fewer children in care - a reduction from 495 to 431 achieved by investments in new services proven to provide more effective support to maintain families safely together
- Education and health outcomes of children in the care population showing clear signs of progress
- Reductions in exclusion rates and much better performance in ensuring those young people who are excluded get their statutory entitlement
- Fewer young people in custody for criminal offences than ever before in the county
- Approval of plans which will see significant investment in 2016 in local mental health services for children and young people

Outcomes such as these, and the quality of outcomes generally for children, have seen us shortlisted last week for the national award of Children's Services Authority of the Year 2016. You may also have seen this week's announcements by the Prime Minister naming North Yorkshire as one of six LA "Partners in Practice" with the DfE aimed at improving children's services practice nationally. These announcements are important recognition of the quality of local work and re-energises for the challenges we still face.

Finally I had opportunity to reflect with a colleague who had been on a great study visit to Japan recently. As well as learning about approaches to her specialist area she also picked up at least two important cultural messages. There is not apparently a Japanese word for “teacher”. These are known, and incidentally very well respected, as “scholars”. Argument being that we are all learning and that learning is a two way process. The “scholars” also struggled with our UK language seeking to differentiate students by ability. They argue that all are able, they just need different support, routes or timescales to get there. Easier to say and practice in a less tested and inspected system but interesting I am sure you agree nonetheless.

Please keep inviting us to schools - it may not always work with our diaries but we remain absolutely keen to be visible out of County Hall whenever possible. It creates chances for the good conversations we always need. It also keeps us grounded and sane! And yes I have finally entered the world of social media and my occasional very short reflections can be now found on Twitter at @petedwyerNY.

A very Happy Christmas and New Year to all – and don’t forget at some point to let me have any feedback on the contents of this message

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Dwyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service