

White Paper News

17 May 2016

Briefing on the government's White Paper "Educational excellence everywhere"

What a difference a few days make!

Since our first White Paper News, the Secretary of State made her announcement on 6th May, which, whilst not in any way departing from the government's direction of travel, made significant concessions in terms of the ways in which schools are able to determine their future. North Yorkshire County Council, together with other high performing councils, had been making strong representations to government about the matter of compulsion, in particular, and our Members are pleased that the Secretary of State has responded in the way she has. A copy of the letter sent by our Leader, Councillor Carl Les, and our Executive Member for Schools and Early Years, Councillor Arthur Barker, can be found at <http://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/educationwhitepaper>.

At the time of writing, we are expecting the Queen's Speech which will outline legislation to follow the White Paper. It is important to remember that neither the White Paper nor the Queen's Speech have any legislative standing; any changes to the law will need to go through the normal processes through the Houses of Commons and Lords.

We welcome the Secretary of State's announcement. It gives valuable "thinking time" for schools and for the local authority. It is clear that a fully academised system is what the government intends; equally it is clear that the route to that may not be straightforward for many schools in North Yorkshire and around the country.

North Yorkshire Local Authority: today and in the future

North Yorkshire is a strong local authority with a clear vision for the future and for education and children's services. That vision is built firmly on school led school improvement, maximising funding for schools and a real respect for the autonomy of quality school leadership in the county.

88% of North Yorkshire schools are judged good or better. Our rate of improvement is twice the national average. Every week sees success stories of schools moving from RI to Good. We are not an authority which the Secretary of State is likely to consider inadequate.

Nor are we anywhere near the “tipping point” mentioned in her statement where the balance of schools no longer supported by a local authority in effect means that authority is unable to support the rest. Currently, only approximately 8% of North Yorkshire schools are academies. To reach the point of a third of schools becoming academies, such a movement would equate to, or even outnumber, the total number of schools in several smaller authorities.

North Yorkshire Local Authority values education and those that provide that education, funding services for them well in excess of national funding expectations for decades. We have a clear vision for all the county’s children, described in “Young and Yorkshire” and we see all schools, whether maintained or academies, as having a key role in supporting outcomes for children articulated in that plan.

The LA has, we believe, experience, skill, expertise and resource. The question is how that historic capacity is best applied in the future. As described earlier the style of leadership has changed over time to a model which fully embraces a school led rather than an LA controlled approach. The success of the county, we believe, has been because we have adapted, have respected schools, recognised the crucial importance of school leadership, and also put great value on leadership of place. We still hold to those values, in the context of the changing landscape of 2016 to 2022. An emphasis on place should not be confused, however, with parochialism or any lack of understanding of the need for us to continue to learn and share from best practice nationally and, indeed, internationally.

Our vision for the future

The LA is committed to further developing a school led self-improving system; this was enshrined in the commission report and its recommendations are now implemented but ripe for enrichment. Teaching School Alliances will be at the heart of this strategy.

The County is committed to supporting all schools and academies now, and in the future, to be as successful as they can possibly be for the communities that they serve. The stronger they are, the stronger the County’s communities are.

North Yorkshire sees all schools at the heart of its growth strategy for communities, families and the County’s economy.

We will continue to deliver high quality services, support and challenge schools and facilitate the development of multi-academy trusts.

We are developing a menu of opportunities for support which schools and multi-academy trusts, as appropriate, will be able to interact with in whatever ways seem appropriate.

More details of this will emerge in the near future but in essence, at one end of the spectrum is the development of increased opportunities for purchasing services through SmartSolutions. At the other end may well be an “umbrella trust” arrangement which may be of interest to smaller multi-academy trusts within the county. We are very mindful of the importance to many school leaders and governors of

geography and community, and the challenges of size. We want to find a mechanism to ensure that schools of a similar view have choices available to them.

It is a complex matter and further clarification is required from government but we are being asked about this possibility by schools across the County and so feel it important to let you know what is being considered.

We will keep you updated about progress on this.

Opportunities to engage and help shape the future

As outlined in the last newsletter, numbers of conversations are taking place between school leaders and senior officers of the authority. We are doing this to try to get a rapid “sense check” of the various views amongst schools/current academies, the academy prospects they are contemplating, and the local circumstances. Those school leaders are from primary schools, from secondary schools and teaching school alliances. We have also prioritized and held initial but constructive discussions with the Special School Improvement Partnership. These conversations are also helping us understand the options for where we need to develop new provision to meet growing numbers of children requiring school places.

Many schools are associated with churches of various faiths and we are seeking to work closely with them and the relevant Dioceses to support and develop their work for the future.

We are encouraged by the ways in which schools, whilst understanding the continuing direction of travel, are taking the opportunity offered by the Secretary of State’s announcement to consider their options carefully before making decisions that will be irrevocable. We support them in that and welcome the opportunities that are being offered to work alongside schools - including existing academy leaders – to help them shape that future. This term’s network and governor meetings will create excellent opportunities for further face to face discussion with larger groups and we are ensuring senior engagement in those sessions from the LA.

For further information/discussion at an individual level, feel free to contact any of the officers below.

As ever, if you have any comments or feedback on this communication they would be welcome.

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