

White Paper News

19 July 2016

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

Navigating the changing landscape

As the end of another school year comes closer, it's hard not to speculate what next year might bring, particularly in the wake of the White Paper and subsequent announcements. The answer to that is – in many respects, whilst we do not know what national policy changes may bring, nor may we know for a little while yet, we can, and are, working diligently at a local and regional level to plan for the future. We are being careful not to take our eye off the ball and we continue to build upon this year's remarkable achievements and improve school standards still further. With very high numbers of children and young people enjoying education in good or outstanding schools, the county is in a stronger position than it has ever been and certainly much stronger than many other parts of the country, so we want to build on this success.

This edition of White Paper News will – to coin a phrase or two – describe some "known knowns" and some "known unknowns".

It will also, we hope, give schools some certainty about what is happening in North Yorkshire and what guidance and support we will be providing as school leaders think about these important developments.

So - what do we know, and what has been happening locally and nationally?

The days immediately after the EU Membership referendum brought a good deal of speculation about the position of the government on a number of key elements, including education policy. Graham Archer, Director for Children's Services in the DfE sent out a letter which provided helpful clarification of the government's position with regard to key reforms in education and social care, and a welcome reaffirmation of the positive roles schools have to play in key areas of social policy. That letter can be [viewed here](#).

As the new government has now been formed, we are waiting to hear from the new Secretary of State for Education as to her priorities for the next few months, including the critical one of school funding reform.

Locally, there have been many opportunities for headteachers, governors, councillors and local authority staff to engage in thinking about the new landscape that will be opening up. Nearly 50 individual discussions, a number of group/cluster meetings, school and governor improvement networks, improvement partnerships, discussions at Executive level at the County Council and with members of the scrutiny committee, and a major governor conference; all these have brought together a richness of thinking and debate that is really welcomed.

And there has been debate. We are long past those early headlines which laid out a landscape which was one of stark contrasts, to one which is more nuanced, more sensitive to local situations and one which starts to play proper regard to the individuality of those positions and the complexity of the education community.

Most recently, the Governor Conference which took place at Solberge Hall last week was welcome evidence of that great debate that is taking place across our education community. The keynote speaker was Professor Toby Greany, Professor of Leadership and Innovation and Head of the London Centre for Leadership in learning, a department of the UCL Institute of Education. A respected academic, with a wide range of interests and experience, including as Special Advisor to an Education and Skills Select Committee, and on the board of a MAT himself, he nonetheless challenged us all, whatever the structural context of individual schools, to concentrate on what makes the most difference to outcomes for children and young people.

This week, we are looking forward to the visit of various people from the DfE who have asked to discuss with us the position of small schools in an academised system. Since this is something that we know is exercising very many school leaders in North Yorkshire, it is welcome that the Department is taking views. We are involving headteachers of small schools – both primary and secondary – in the meeting.

The future role of the local authority

Nationally, there is to be a major review of the role of local authorities in relation to children and education. Alan Wood – a former past President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services – will chair an advisory group supporting the DfE and a consultation will take place in September.

More information has been emerging about this important work. We now know that 16 themes have been identified which fall into four areas:

- ❖ The quality of provision made by schools
- ❖ Places for children; early years through to post 16
- ❖ Special educational needs and alternative provision
- ❖ The early years role of the local authority – which is to be enhanced

We very much look forward to this. The early signs are encouraging: the independent chair who has wide experience of children's services, the presence of the current President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services and early affirmation of the critical role the local authority will continue to have. It will inform our thinking on the way in which North Yorkshire Children and Young People's Service will develop and continue to support schools.

In the light of the feedback from schools over the last few weeks, there are two particular pieces of work which we hope will be of help to school leaders and governors:

1. we are putting together guidance for schools on forming or becoming part of a multi-academy trust, which we have "road tested" with governors attending the Governor Conference earlier this month. Subject to views coming back, that will be with you right at the beginning of September, and we hope it will be useful.
2. We are continuing to investigate what possibilities there are for a North Yorkshire "Learning Trust" and will be coming back to you for views in the early part of the Autumn Term. We are researching the legal position, as well as investigating the approaches being taken, or being contemplated by other authorities. This may take the form of a wider schools/skills standards commission, a trust focused on the delivery and trading of services to schools, a strategic body to support the work of schools in tackling the most intransigent issues or a professional support partnership led by and supporting schools, or some or all of these. Its principles will be based upon the work of the commission and determined by North Yorkshire schools.

It's fair to say that whilst there is a lot of agreement in principle about the continuing need for a strong strategic partnership there is no consensus about the detail at present, particularly on the key aspect of whether a North Yorkshire Learning Trust might be in a position to be a sponsor of academies through a Multi Academy Trust. There are pros and cons to that, and we will lay out our thinking in more detail next term.

Conclusion

After what has been an unexpectedly turbulent year in terms of education policy and practice, we wish you well for a good summer break and look forward to continuing the "big conversation" next term. As ever, feedback would be welcomed. Please contact any of the people below.

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