



DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

for learning in Devon

6 January 2004

**Report of the launch of the debate to prepare for Devon's
Single Education Plan, December 2004**

Achieving Excellence for learning in Devon

BACKGROUND

On 14 November 2003 members of the Schools Forum met with officers and members of the County Council, and other partner organisations, for a Vision Day. Phil Norrey, the recently appointed Director of Education, Arts & Libraries, set a context for education in the 21st Century; and during the day cross-representational groups worked together to identify what they believed to be the main influences on the horizon, and what their key shared aspirations for Devon might be.

They also agreed a framework and timescale for consultation, recognising that shared objectives would need to be debated and finalised as part of Devon's preparation for submitting its first Single Education Plan later this year. The SEP will from April 2005 replace a number of current plans, promoting stronger links and channelling energies into clear, cross-cutting strategic objectives. It must develop within the overarching goals of the County Council but the Director's intention is that it also captures and promotes the objectives that are most important to schools and other stakeholders. The SEP is a three year Plan, but as Devon has been invited to participate in an earlier tranche, Devon's first SEP will span four years, 2005-2009.

A report of the Vision Day is available on www.devon.gov.uk/eal/moretonhampstead/

LAUNCH EVENT: 6 JANUARY 2004

It was agreed that an early launch would be instigated to raise awareness and prepare schools in particular for wider debate with the Director, within their own schools, and with each other.

Schools were invited to send representatives, and a wider number of colleagues from other agencies, who could not be included in the Vision Day, were also invited. About 320 people attended.

A leaflet highlighting the main themes which had emerged was prepared for the day and subsequently circulated more widely.

THE LAUNCH PRESENTERS AND KEY MESSAGES

A cross-section of Forum members who had contributed to the Vision Day introduced some of the main themes, reporting on what Forum members had said and adding their own thoughts:

- Ivan Godfrey, County Secretary of Devon Association of Governors, spoke about how extended schools could overcome a narrow view of what education can achieve;
- David Birch, the chair of Devon Association of Secondary Heads, developed the discussion on learning communities which put learners first;
- Joe Flynn, the chair of Devon Association of Primary Heads, expanded initial thinking on what sort of LEA schools would like to work with; and
- Jan Baker, head of Orchard Vale and Deputy chair of DAPH, shared her commitment to a vision of real parental involvement in children's learning.
- Professor Ted Wragg, now retired from the chair of Education in Exeter but still teaching in Exeter schools and contributing his reflections to wider educational thinking, gave a key note speech which firmly centred the debate in teaching and learning.
- Phil Norrey shared his overview of national and local contexts with the wider audience, and also (on behalf of the chair of Devon's Special Heads' Association, Hilary Green, unfortunately unable to speak directly because of laryngitis) made reference to the continuing but changing role of Special Schools. The Powerpoint headlines of Phil's presentation are available on www.devon.gov.uk/eal/moretonhampstead/. He drew attention to the steps towards excellence; and emphasised that we should have high expectations of and aspirations for both young people and all those engaged in educating them.

This session was an inaugural event: it shared the thinking so far as a platform for debate, and launched the work to be undertaken through the year.

Phil Norrey outlined how discussion will be taken forward, with widespread consultation

- with schools: through heads, governors, parents and pupils;
- with DCC members: through established policy development routes;
- with DCC staff and their client groups: through service frameworks;
- with other agencies: through appropriate mechanisms;
- with stakeholders (some of whom will be included above) through other routes: for example, through youth groups, parent liaison and Citizen's Panels;
- with hard to reach groups: through targeted initiatives.

A synopsis of each speaker's presentation is given below.

TED WRAGG

1. We are engaged in the management of change and must reflect on the nature of changes facing us, both in socio-economic structures and in achieving the best in teaching and learning.
2. We are not just preparing children for the duration of our 10-15 year Vision; we are preparing them for eighty fruitful years, for a lifetime's fulfilment.
3. Employment patterns will shift to jobs requiring 'people skills': hospitality, caring professions, communications. Time spent in school developing the whole person must be central not add-on: teamwork, using initiative, personal qualities.
4. Styles of teaching and learning can promote this through any subject, e.g. problem-solving.
5. We are engulfed in information; 'knowledge' internalises it.
6. Teachers are exploring ways to interpret factual information and best styles of enabling children to do this; the National Curriculum can be taught many different ways and some will open doors to a lifetime ability to learn.
7. Everyone has an on / off switch. Motivation is flicking the on-switch.
8. You are never too old to learn. The Third Age (retirement) may in future be the longest learning period.
9. Teaching could but must not become a dreary activity:
 - not opposed to framework strategies (like literacy and numeracy) but avoid formulaic approaches;
 - don't lose the edge of an intuitive, professional approach and lessons;
 - don't live life in the shadow of tests and inspections;
 - a broad and balanced curriculum promotes success in basics;
 - foment excitement about professional skills of teachers;
 - take professional risks: you can and should 'reinvent the wheel': it is a legitimate way forward; if you have an idea, back it.
10. PN reflected on what TW had said which highlighted how much talent and experimentation there already is in Devon's schools; the coming debate must help to identify and celebrate that and give us courage to pursue what we believe to be the right path to success.

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IVAN GODFREY

1. We are in danger of being constrained by the Pink Floyd view of education: 'another brick in the wall'; an anti-culture undermining our children.
2. We must challenge any 'conspiracy of mediocrity' around us: extend schools as hubs of learning communities, supporting regeneration, promoting articulation of concerns, and hotbeds of community action.
3. There will be different solutions for different schools. 'Do what is right for you'; many schools already have extended activities.
4. Everyone has a role to make this happen:
 - PTAs: PTA Devon well established innovators;
 - Heads: management and leadership in cultural change;
 - Governors: key instigators; representatives of their communities;
 - DCC: work across Directorates and with other partners.
5. Try to think beyond resources; don't be trammelled by lack of them.
6. Don't need to work alone: work with parents, with other schools. Communications key: including local media - involve them.
7. Strive to reach the hard-to-reach.
8. David Hargreaves in his paper 'Education Epidemic' stressed the need for interaction:

'As long as we use very different terms for explaining good schools and good communities, we risk talking about how schools can be improved or transformed as if this could be done independently of the community'.

DAVID BIRCH

1. Reflected on Devon's tradition of Community Colleges: an ethos of commitment to learning communities.
2. Academic Councils: may now be the wrong name; but structures specific to Devon, well-developed and of huge further potential.
3. Historic differences between primary and secondary cultures: a potential huge culture shock for transferring child, over the short space of the summer holidays; ACs have contribution here.
4. Learner must be first and central in thinking; climate is right for schools to collaborate and innovate.

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5. Development of learning communities will be important for Devon's towns and villages.
6. Only route to survival for small village schools: they will be the visible sign of learning in all communities, and will benefit from the extended school proposals.
7. Will BSF (government building programme for secondaries) take sufficient account of potential for collaborative work on one site? colocation of agencies? an integrated 0-19 campus?
8. Parents should be encouraged to send children to their local school.
Joan Sallis: 'achievement alone has little meaning'. Consider wider ramifications: 'your children have to live in a world with other people's children'.

JAN BAKER

1. Reflection on how the 'vision', the 'big picture', will be translated into what actually happens in schools.
2. Everyone understands better if they feel they are on the inside, looking out. How to make that happen?
3. It will take huge energy and commitment locally. Reflect on how much time and effort goes into the big celebratory events at school; 'moments of sheer delight' - but energy - intensive. Would wish to be evaluated on what schools achieve through the whole life of the school. Schools can make a difference.
4. If you can influence parents, you influence children. Where are the greatest aspirational moments? - with new parents. They all want the best for their children. Very receptive early on - when is it lost? Harness these early feelings - from womb onwards!
5. Don't under-estimate power of dialogue with parents. Listen. Make mistakes and learn from them.
6. Real part to play in whole communities: foster local pride, challenge assumptions, take risks, can raise aspirations.
7. We should talk ourselves up more; not just a message from school leaders - the conviction must also come through in what the TA says in the playground.
8. Be part of a wider agenda - through Academic Councils and with other agencies - where all can have courage of convictions, stick together, challenge constraining factors.

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JOE FLYNN

1. Can the "LEA" become a "Devon Learning Partnership"? Build a cathedral': requires a Can-Do culture.
2. Innovation - difficulty of perceptions about Devon? Need to sell ourselves better. Need to be outward-looking.
3. Will be defined in future by our capacity to learn, our ability to transfer best practice.
4. His school talks about 'being brave', in context of managing change and taking risks. 'Learners' have this ability, 'the learned' may not. Aim high - don't fear falling short. Always set high expectations.
5. We need to define what Devon believes a successful school looks like.
6. Team work: several issues to reflect on
 - a team game needs a game plan (sound planning and not just reactive);
 - high profile for learning underpins;
 - ethos must be stronger than personalities;
 - 'distributed leadership': explore possibilities;
 - LEA "umbrella and safety net"; should sometimes say no;
 - we all need to be models of good practice as learning organisations.
7. Must ensure all members of Devon's educational family feel involved.
8. Will need huge commitment: all need to put our backs into it. Need to remember that 'our children are our best hope for the future' (JFK).

Director's Conferences

Date	Venue	Time
Thursday 5 February	Bedford Hotel Tavistock	1.30 for 2.00 p.m. (refreshments) until 5.00 p.m.
Monday 9 February	Tiverton Hotel	1.30 for 2.00 p.m. (refreshments) until 5.00 p.m.
Wednesday 11 February	Rougemont Hotel Exeter	9.00 for 9.30 a.m. (refreshments) until 12.30 p.m.
Wednesday 11 February	Lord Haldon Hotel Dunchideock	1.30 for 2.00 p.m. (refreshments) until 5.00 p.m.
Thursday 12 February	Cedars Hotel Barnstaple	9.00 for 9.30 a.m. (refreshments) until 12.30 p.m.
Friday 13 February	Buckfast Abbey Conference Centre	9.00 for 9.30 a.m. (refreshments) until 12.30 p.m.