

RESPONSE TO DCSF CONSULTATION ON TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SCHOOLS

Question 1: Do you support the overall vision of 21st century school system in paragraphs 2.1-2.12

Devon supports the vision outlined within The Twenty First Century Schools consultation paper. This document provides a strong policy framework clearly defining the role of schools within the broader Children Services 'landscape for learning'. The ideas outlined in this paper offer many opportunities for schools to secure a unique contribution to system-wide change.

Question 2: Is there anything missing from the vision for 21st century school system?

- I. We would like to see more detail about how shared accountabilities will be used to challenge those schools and other partners who might wish to retain an inward looking perspective or promote self interest.
- II. Governance for the twenty first century also needs greater emphasis within the overarching vision and infrastructure for change.

Question 3: How can we support stronger partnership with parents for the purposes of teaching and learning and wider school activities?

- I. Rural isolation, poor transportation systems and pockets of deprivation within more affluent communities are barriers facing some Devon families. This can diminish their capacity to access wider school activities and positively support teaching and learning. The introduction of the disadvantage subsidy will help to some degree but may not fully address the needs of families in isolated areas.
- II. Better access through the application of technology should be explored as it can provide a bridge between home and school learning particularly for those children and young people who may not have access to the internet at home.

Question 4: Do you agree with the description in Para 3.17 of an effective system of early intervention?

- I. Paragraph 3.17 provides a comprehensive list of actions that will support effective early intervention practice. Schools will need to commit expertise and financial resources to facilitate early intervention and joint commissioning. This may require some active disinvestment within current structures at a time when budgets are getting tighter and in some areas a decline in the child population,
- II. Expectations of early intervention work cannot be scaled down for very small or rural schools. Formalised systems and intensive training programmes will place significant demands on staff time in schools with very few staff. Specialist roles working across a federation, a school cluster or commissioned through Local Children's Trusts would provide support for aspects of this work.

Question 5: What additional support is needed to enable schools to extend their role in developing sustainable and cohesive communities?

- I. We would like to see more support and guidance for governors because they hold the overarching statutory responsibility for promoting community cohesion and are the strategic link between schools and local communities. The Twenty First Century schools consultation paper pays too little attention to the role and potential impact of governors.
- II. Formal federation of schools across village communities has shown that aspects of community cohesion can be achieved through closer working and sharing responsibility for the education of children across communities. This model also has the potential to offer more sustainable patterns of schooling within rural areas.
- III. Forest School, a broad range of outdoor learning activities and a curriculum that promotes environmental awareness should be age appropriate and in place for every child and young person.

Question 6a: Which do you think could be a more effective partnership model?

a) a single partnership which delivers as far as possible across a range of collaborative activity or b) a number of fluid partnerships which form and change to deliver activities?

- I. Both models can be appropriate and applicable depending on the context and purpose of those partnerships. For example a secondary school may be part of a hard federation with its co-located primary school but also working as part of broader 14 to 19 partnerships.
- II. Whatever the model, sustainable partnerships must establish a shared purpose and formalise their aspirations for the children, young people and families in their community. 'Hard wired' partnerships (e.g. Trusts, federations, school companies) also need to be well resourced through professional infrastructures, pooled budgets and strong strategic leadership as it is these infrastructures rather than structure itself that will make the partnerships work.
- III. Locality based partnerships of schools and other agencies or services require a range of hard data so that a shared focus can be agreed. They must also be able to access specialist skills and facilitation to make sure that the partnership (whatever its structure) is successful.

Question 6b: How best can the performance/impact of partnerships of schools and other services be recognised and monitored?

- I. Formalised shared targets (supported by collaborative planning processes) should be identified through the systematic interrogation of detailed and locally tailored data profiles. These metrics should include performance data from every school in that community alongside health outcomes, community wellbeing and relevant socio economic information. The Local Children's Trust should retain an overview of accountabilities through its planning and commissioning processes.
- II. Accountabilities need to be aligned both at school and local multi-agency partnership level otherwise some schools or partners may quietly side step

individual actions that contribute to an overarching goal. It is important that there is highly visible, shared responsibility for the attainment and well-being of all children and young people living in that community and not judged just by the work of individual schools. External evaluation and particularly Ofsted inspection processes need to be flexible enough to respond to the nuances of local organisational and partnership structures.

- III. The Local Children's Trust must retain the strategic responsibilities for the locality but joint governance arrangements across schools could provide a local layer of operational accountabilities.

Question 6c: Other than how we measure performance what are the key changes that need to be made to drive the development of stronger partnerships?

- i. Strong infrastructures need practical systems to manage local budgets, drive commissioning and procurement processes and employ staff more flexibly across schools. It is unreasonable to expect one school or the LA to always carry employment responsibility for a number of partnerships.
- ii. Strengthen the expectation and accountabilities of the strategic leadership by governors and headteachers so that more democratic and inclusive practice can develop **across school clusters**. Schools judged to be outstanding by Ofsted should be able to demonstrate that they are proactive in partnership work beyond their own school and are actively contributing to raising standards in other schools. This can be particularly relevant for the largest schools and should be immediately included in the Ofsted framework.
- iii. Devolve funding to local partnerships with powers to allocate resources in line with participation in collaborative work to raise achievement and promote well being for all children in that community. Schools could be inspected as part of a cluster judged by their collective contribution to the work of the local Children's Trust. Otherwise it is impossible for inspectors to make consistent judgements about how different schools within the same area meet their statutory duty to cooperate.

Question 7: What leadership and accountability arrangements are needed for local partnerships to secure a shared focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people?

See all of the above. The School Report Card may unwittingly reinforce traditional competitive practice with schools operating in isolation from each other but working with a number of other partners. This could lead to additional demands on wider children services and unnecessary duplication e.g. co-located schools. The quality and impact of school to school partnership could have a more significant influence on the final overarching school report card assessment and more strongly prioritised in the hierarchy of judgements?

Question 8a: What are the main challenges to the children and young people's workforce in delivering the vision of the 21st century?

- I. Making sure there is clarity about roles and responsibilities alongside ensuring the right skills-set and expertise is available to all children and their families regardless of where they live (urban/rural).

- II. Create flexibilities and movement between roles and settings but parity in status and pay across different roles have to be achieved. This needs careful consideration with (in some cases) dismantling traditional hierarchies and staffing structures.

Question 8b: How might we address these?

- I. More flexible employment training structures and working practice will be needed especially for posts that work across different schools, partnerships and settings.
- II. Modernise governance infrastructures to avoid capping for schools and a different approach to budget surplus. Strategic governance needs to oversee the needs of children across whole communities and not just those attending the school they serve. More outward looking governance will better promote community cohesion and the more efficient use of resources already available in the system.