

From Anne Whiteley

I hope you all enjoyed the long Easter weekend and are now, no doubt, looking forward to the school holidays. I wish you all a relaxing break.

Just before Easter I had the great pleasure of attending a Great Debate, hosted by Blackpool Primary, at which more than 50 pupils from eight local schools debated the key issues affecting their lives. The pupils – who were all Year 3 and above – came from Blackpool, Ashburton, Buckfastleigh, Chudleigh Knighton, Bovey Tracey, Ilsington, St Catherine's and Widecombe primary schools.

Both Mary Nisbet, who chairs the Devon Children's Trust, and I were deeply impressed by the children's articulacy, the wide range of subjects they covered and their courtesy and politeness to one another. Among the topics they covered was the amount of housebuilding going on in Devon and the threat to the environment, the need for better public transport to encourage people to stop using their cars, the need for good play areas and facilities for teenagers to stop them wrecking the younger children's facilities and the need for councils to listen to children when they are planning services for them and demonstrate they have listened.

I hope this will be the first of many such debates and I am keen for all the partners in the Children's Trust to be present at future events. We know it is vital to listen to the voices of children and young people and we have been involving teenagers in our work. I believe this event will be a springboard to involving primary-aged children in our work as well.

You are probably aware the Boundary Committee for England is conducting a review of local government across the whole of Devon following the failed bid for unitary status by Exeter last year. The Government has asked the Boundary Committee to advise Ministers by the end of this year whether an alternative unitary council or councils could be created to replace the existing county and district council system. Devon County Council has welcomed the review and will be developing ideas for reforming local government in consultation with its staff and stakeholders. The Boundary Committee's draft proposals for Devon will be published on July 7 for 12 weeks of public consultation.

Our new Director of Learning and Schools, Judith Johnson, will be taking up her post on April 21. She has already had the chance to meet a number of you on her visits to Devon so far and, I know, is looking forward to meeting many more. Judith has already planned a programme of school visits for the summer term and is intending to visit at least two schools a week over the coming months.

Finally, I am delighted to be able to tell you that Debbie Pritchard – who many of you will know - has been appointed to the post of CYPS Assistant Director for Performance and Planning. She will take up the post today and be located within the Policy and Strategy Branch of the Directorate.



Above average first preference performance

The latest DCSF statistics show that Devon met over 90 per cent of the first preferences expressed for secondary school admissions for September 2008. That is just above the average for the area of 87.9 per cent with Plymouth recording 89 per cent and Torbay 76 per cent.

In the last *Headlines* we reported on the welcome increase in our take-up for online applications. Devon came in at 68.1 per cent of families applying for a place online. The DCSF statistics show we achieved the second highest take-up in the South West with North Somerset taking first place with 73 per cent take-up. Plymouth achieved 47 per cent and Torbay 42 per cent.

Contact Karen Howes on karen.howes@devon.gov.uk

New Child Protection Plans

Child Protection Registers are being phased out across England and Wales from today (Apr 1) and replaced with child protection plans. Every child who would have been added to the register will now have a child protection plan. However there is no change to the child protection process when there are concerns about a child and the need to make a referral.

Contact Chris Dimmelow on chris.dimmelow@devon.gov.uk

Volunteers sought for help with reading practice

The search is on for volunteers among Devon County Council staff to help children with their reading skills in local schools. The initiative, run by the county council, will build on the existing successful Right to Read scheme, and is part of the National Year of Reading project.

The call has gone out to staff who feel able to offer reading support to get in touch with the council's employee volunteering scheme.

Contact Roger Kirk on rmkirk@onetel.net

School meals online

The bulk of primary schools are now able to sell school meals on line with the recent roll out of the shopping basket. We are also doing further testing to enable schools to manage their own products such as clothing and school trips. This sits well with Devon County Council policy which is to do business electronically wherever possible.

Contact Chris Stokes on chris.stokes@devon.gov.uk

Directory of Domestic Violence Services

The Devon Domestic Violence Partnership has published a directory of services which are available across the county. The directory provides contact information for anyone who is affected by domestic violence or abuse. A hard copy is being sent to all Devon schools and is also available online at www.adva.org.uk under the key publications section.

Contact Susannah Hunter on susannah.hunter@devon.gov.uk