

17, MARCH 2009

From Anne Whiteley

Well, well, well. What an eventful few days we've had. As I trailed in the last Headlines, Devon County Council was confirmed as a four-star, excellent authority by the Audit Commission which said that our children's services were performing well. Naturally we are all delighted with this accolade and I would repeat my thanks to those of you who took part in the inspection process which led to this excellent result. The majority of you who were not directly involved also helped us win the four stars, however, because school performance was one of the key indicators on which we were judged. So thank you all for your efforts.

On top of the four stars, in a separate set of awards, CYPS has won Beacon status at the Local Government Awards for the strategic commissioning of services for children and their families. This was the first time that strategic commissioning was a Beacon category so we are all very pleased at this success.

We were visited by inspectors during the judging process and we took them to Wilcombe Primary in Tiverton to see the work that has been done there with the children's centre. Obviously they were impressed and we know what particularly bowled them over was the way we are involving children and young people as commissioners of services. This is a vital component of our commitment to ensure that the voices of our young people are both heard and acted on.

The Communities Minister Sadiq Khan commented at the awards: "My congratulations go out to Devon County Council. The Beacons are about showcasing the very best in service delivery. Devon County Council are among the top performers in their field, setting the standard for innovation, service excellence and improvement."

But enough back-slapping and onto less cheerful matters. Tomorrow (Wednesday 18) the Devon Education Forum will be discussing the way forward in our campaign for Fair Funding for Schools. I remarked in the last Headlines that you may have seen Richard Newton-Chance doing a sterling job spelling out the implications of the historic poor funding for Devon's schools on BBC Spotlight. Since then Devon has been heavily featured in a two-page article in the TES to which both Richard and I contributed. There have also been a number of articles in Devon's newspapers about the difficulties individual schools are facing. While column inches are not in themselves a measure of success, we need to ensure that public opinion is on our side – particularly with local elections in June and a General Election not far off - and I believe we will best do this by emphasising the unfairness of the current formula. Obviously I will keep you updated in the next Headlines on the Forum's deliberations and how we intend to take the campaign forward.



First preference allocations up

Our figures for secondary school allocations improved again this year with 90.72 per cent of applicants receiving their first preference for a secondary school this September. That compares with 89.5 per cent this time last year. The figure will rise during the year as appeals are heard. In all, 99.26 per cent of applicants received one of their three preferences for a secondary school. We received applications from over 7,500 families. A record 81 per cent applied for a secondary school place using Devon's online system – the highest in the country. This is up from just 18 per cent four years ago.

For more information contact Karen Howes at karen.howes@devon.gov.uk

Good improvement in attendance

The latest DCSF figures on attendance show Devon's primary, secondary and special schools performed better on overall attendance and persistent absence than fellow schools in the South West and nationally. Persistent absence in secondary schools was down 1.3 per cent in 2007/08 over the previous year. The figure of 5 per cent meets our DCSF target for persistent absence three years ahead of schedule

More information from Beverley Dubash at beverleydubash@devon.gov.uk

Parenting support advisors' roll-out

Following pilots in the Exeter Central, Ilfracombe, Teign Valley and Tiverton LCs, we are extending the funding for the appointment of parenting support advisors to all Learning Communities from April. The funding is formula-based and will support the appointment of PSAs. ESS capital funding will support school-based accommodation.

More information from Neal Chislett at neal.chislett@devon.gov.uk

Disadvantage subsidy pilot

We've received over £403,000 to pilot the Extended Services Disadvantage Subsidy from April 2009 to August 2010. The aim of the subsidy is to help poorer families take more advantage of the 'varied menu' element of the ESS core offer. The pilot will take place in the Barnstaple, Tavistock, Teign Valley, Teignmouth and Exeter Beacon LCs.

More information from Annie Straw at annie.straw@devon.gov.uk