

Schools Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 1st March, 2011 at 4.00 p.m. at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall

Present:-

- Mr. J. Baker (Chairman)
- Mr. S. Flynn (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr. M. Vlahakis
- Mr. A.F. Cheminais
- Mr. D. Browns word
- Mr. G. Crowther
- Dame M. Brennan
- Mr. J.P. Clarke
- Ms. H. Lomas
- Mr. F. Hodgkinson
- Mr. N. Stubbs
- Mrs. M. Robinson
- Mr. D. Clough
- Mr. A. Bowater
- Mrs. Stringer (substituting for Ms. M. Cryan)
- Ms. J. Morrow (substituting for Mr. A. Basi)

In Attendance:-

- Ms. C. Draper (Short Heath Federation) (shadowing Mr. Cheminais)
- Mr. J. Murray (St. Francis Catholic Primary School) (Observer)
- Ms. H. Keenan (Brownhills School)
- Ms. L. Hall (Walsall MBC)
- Mr. D. Harman (Walsall MBC)
- Mr. D. Mortiboys (Walsall MBC)
- Ms. J. Taylor (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
- Ms. A. Walton (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
- Ms. D. Morris (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)

		Action
1. 1.3.11	Apologies Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Ms. M. Cryan, Ms. V. Birch, Ms. A. Barker and Mr. A. Basi.	
2. 1.3.11	Minutes - 18th January, 2011	The minutes of the meeting held on 18 th January, 2011 be approved and signed

		<p>by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:-</p> <p>The inclusion of Mr. Basi in the list of apologies.</p>
<p>3. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Matters arising from the minutes</p> <p>The Chairman confirmed that the resolution on page 3 related to changes to the grants system.</p>	
<p>4. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>There were no items for consideration in the private session.</p>	
<p>5. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Revised Scheme for Financing Schools</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor referred to the changes included in the report and drew attention to Paragraph 3 of the report relating to the closure of schools in order to protect the school's budget. This did not apply to Academies under the converter rules, those under the old Academy Regulations would result in the deficit referring back to the Local Authority. The Scheme for Financing Schools was a statutory document and there was a requirement to consult with every school and governing body and for formal ratification by Schools Forum.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That Schools Forum agree to consult schools on the proposed changes to the draft Scheme for Financing Schools, as detailed in Paragraph 2.1 and Section 3 of the annexed report; the proposed changes being of a mainly technical update to reflect the policy of</p>	

	<p>the current Government and legislative changes, along with one local policy change detailed in Section 3 of the report;</p> <p>(2) That all schools and Head Teachers be given the opportunity to comment on the changes during March, 2011 before formal ratification of the Scheme by Schools Forum.</p>	
<p>6. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Central retention of former National Strategies Grant Matched Funding</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That this item be deferred to a future meeting to enable the Primary and Secondary Forum to discuss the matter.</p>	
<p>7. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Central retention of former Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn referred to discussions that had taken place at an earlier meeting and moved:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">That the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant monies be 100% devolved to schools.</p> <p>Seconded by Mr. Hodgkinson.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor informed the Forum that the funding would need to go into the general pot and distributed via the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU).</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant monies be 100% devolved to schools.</p>	
<p>8. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Financial arrangements to support the transfer of Sneyd pupils during the closure period</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p>	

	<p>Ms. Taylor stated that it was necessary for Schools Forum to agree this matter as, during the Council agreed transfer closure process, it had been agreed that children move at the end of their Key Stage to other schools in the area and that Sneyd would receive 5/12ths of the funding for those coming to the end of their Key Stage. With regard to Year 9, in 2010/11, Sneyd received half the funding and, under the same arrangements, it would not only be Year 9; all year groups would have to move school at the end of this academic year as the closure had been brought forward.</p> <p>In response to questions, Ms. Taylor confirmed that residual amounts in the contingency were ringfenced for Walsall schools. The school accounts would remain open until 31st March, 2012 and when these were closed down at the end of the financial year, most issues would have been dealt with and provision in the accounts would be made for elements that were not. The money follows the transferring pupils in September, 2011 as long as they remain in the Borough.</p> <p>Mr. Mortiboys confirmed that Walsall Council had already taken up significant redundancy costs in respect of the Sneyd closure and would meet 100% of the redundancy costs.</p> <p>Ms. Walton informed the Forum that when Sneyd numbers started to reduce, the school had significant balances which have been used by the school and the Interim Executive Board (IEB) to manage the closure. Walsall Children's Services - Serco was confident that the school would close without a deficit. It was not always possible to close a school with a balanced budget.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That approval be given to the proposal for money to follow Sneyd Community School pupils from Years 8 and 9 to their destination Walsall schools in September, 2011;</p> <p>(2) That approval be given to the retention of a sum of approximately £94,000 in the 2011/12 school specific contingency for this purpose; the sum comprising of £70,000 for the traditional budget, plus approximately</p>	
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	£24,000 for the new mainstreamed grants.	
9. 1.3.11	<p>Free school meals data</p> <p>Ms. L. Hall, Walsall MBC, Benefits Section, informed the Forum that free school meal claims had increased by 20%. It was hoped to improve the exchange of data between the Council and Serco by the updating of back office systems which were proposed to be introduced in May, 2011 to provide a more organised and secure exchange facility. She referred to the importance of working with schools in order to increase the free school meal activities in view of the funding adjustments. She stated that a questionnaire would be forwarded to schools asking them to identify what they would like from the service.</p> <p>In response to points raised, Ms. Hall confirmed that the Welfare Rights Unit was separate to benefits and their role was to assist customers to claim any benefit entitlement. With regard to the problems of sharing data, Ms. Hall stated that some of the data belonged to the Department for Work and Pensions. Benefits did have access to secure data and could speed up and improve benefit claims. If National Insurance numbers and dates of birth were included, it was possible to assess whether there was an entitlement to benefits. Information held by the Benefits Team and passed on related to children eligible for free school meals and should be circulated through the AVCO system. The application form was on the website and it was hoped that an e-form link to the secure information website could be developed and an immediate response could then be provided as to whether a family qualified for free school meals.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor pointed out that it was also an issue that when children moved school, parents would tell the school but not necessarily the Benefits office. The two-way flow of information was essential and weekly changes to the central pupil data could be passed to the Benefits Team.</p> <p>Ms. Hall stated that the updated system proposed would automatically upload information on school changes into the system and would be aware of critical dates for schools in order to maximise</p>	

	<p>information.</p> <p>Mr. Cheminais referred to the secure data links and the AVCO secure data system and the need for the upgraded system to capture the unique personal pupil number.</p> <p>Members thanked Ms. Hall for her presentation.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information provided by Ms. Hall be noted.</p>	
<p>10. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Dates for future meetings 2011/12</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That, subject to availability of the venue, the timetable for meetings of the Forum be agreed for the year as follows, the meetings to be held at 4.00 p.m. at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Tuesday, 29th March, 2011 (Spring) Tuesday, 14th June, 2011 (Summer) Tuesday, 18th October, 2011 (Autumn) Tuesday 6th December, 2011 (Autumn) Tuesday, 17th January, 2012 (Spring) Tuesday, 13th March, 2012 (Spring)</p> <p>(2) That in the event of additional meetings proving necessary, provisional dates be agreed as follows:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Tuesday, 27th September, 2011 Tuesday, 8th November, 2011</p> <p>(3) That approval be given to a special meeting being held on Wednesday, 16th March, 2011 at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall commencing at 4.00 p.m.</p>	
<p>11. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>The Forward Plan was submitted.</p>	

	<p>Resolved</p> <p>That the Forward Plan be approved as set out, subject to the inclusion of School Funding to the 16th March, 2011 meeting and Equal Pay to be presented to the Spring term meeting.</p> <p>Early Years Funding Sub-Group - Easter} DFE Education Endowment Fund } have put New collaboration initiative } these issues out to tender</p>	
<p>12. 1.3.11</p>	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Correspondence from the Head Teacher of Brownhills School, together with a summary of costings for Sneyd pupils were submitted.</p> <p>The Chairman introduced this and informed Members that an update on figures had been provided and tabled at the meeting.</p> <p>The Head Teacher and Chair of Governors were present and Mrs. Keenan (Head Teacher) addressed the meeting on the implications on Brownhills School following the transfer of pupils from Sneyd School during the year and its impact on the budget. She confirmed that the pupils coming into Brownhills were not all of the same year group and did not slot easily into a year group. Journey and transport costs were not taken into account and those transferring included some of the most vulnerable children in the Borough. The effort and support the school had put in for pupil travel had not been acknowledged.</p> <p>Mr. Hodgkinson referred to the cost of transporting pupils safely rather than using public transport which would involve more than one bus journey. These costs should be taken into account.</p> <p>Mrs. Keenan and Mr. Hodgkinson left the meeting as they had an interest in this matter.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor informed the Forum that there were no powers to take money away from a delegated school budget and any funding would have to be</p>	

	<p>met via contingency.</p> <p>Mr. Crowther stated that he was on the Interim Executive Board and the Chairman agreed that there was no conflict of interest.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to previous cases where the Local Authority moved pupils rather than parents choosing to move pupils. In the event of the Authority moving pupils, there should be some cost compensation but if schools were compensated when parents moved children, it would have greater implications.</p> <p>Mr. Vlahakis pointed out that, as a number of children had left Brownhills School, the new intake of pupils had led to no change in the total number.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor confirmed that there had been a large Year 11 year group who had left at the end of the last academic year and a smaller Year 7 cohort going into the school.</p> <p>Members discussed the matter thoroughly.</p> <p>Ms. Walton confirmed that Brownhills had extreme budget pressures and had been through difficult times, largely because of the schools issues. The school had massive increases in successful examination results and their numbers were now increasing. The school had been supported to encourage Sneyd pupils to Brownhills and the provision of transport had incurred expenses as a result. By taking Sneyd pupils, it had improved the position of Brownhills school but had also incurred a cost.</p> <p>Mr. Cheminais referred to problems experienced in the past as a result of school closures and felt that a discussion was necessary after Sneyd had closed in order that a system, policy or reference for future closures could be introduced.</p> <p>After consideration it was,</p> <p>Resolved (2 Members abstained)</p> <p>That the request for additional funding by Brownhills School as a result of a large number of mid-year transfers from Sneyd School be rejected.</p>	
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	Mr. Hodgkinson and Mrs. Keenan returned to the meeting and were advised of the Forum's decision.	
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The meeting terminated at 5.20 p.m.