

# Council Meeting – 8 November 2010

## Notice of Motion – Education Issues

### Introduction

The following notice has been submitted from Councillor Cassidy, Robertson, Burley, Oliver, Wilkes Chambers and Westley.

*This Council notes, with regret, the contents of the briefing note regarding Sneyd School, considered by the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel at its meeting on 27th September, 2010 and resolves to formally acknowledge that all children and young people who have attended the school during the past five years have been offered a very poor experience in terms of their education.*

*Notes with concern the slow, and in some cases static, levels of GCSE attainment at Key stages 4 and 5 within parts of the Borough*

*Resolves to address further strategic challenges, including the development of post-16 education, and our performance relating to looked-after children.*

*Calls for the immediate re-constitution of an oft-promised successor body to WEB (Walsall Education Board), which was dissolved in 2008 but which has still to be replaced"*

### Background Information

The issues raised in the notice of motion cover a number of different regulations and services provided by Walsall Council and Children's Services Serco on behalf of Walsall Council. The information below describes some of the ways in which the issues raised are being addressed. Additional relevant information is provided in the appendices.

#### **1 Sneyd School**

Since the Council made the decision to close Sneyd School after careful consideration of all the relevant facts in relation to the situation at the school, regular reports have been made to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel. This has ensured that there has been regular reporting on the situation at the school. The closure process at Sneyd School has been carefully planned in order to minimise the effect on individual children. A planned transfer of children was designed, although significant numbers of parents have moved their children outside of the planned timetable. This has added to some of the challenges at the school. These have been managed by the leadership and staff of the school, both under the previous interim Head Teacher and under the present situation where Barr Beacon School is providing leadership to ensure a good curriculum is available to the students.

The achievement levels of the students in 2010 did improve in the 5+A\*-C GCSE including English and maths measure, and remained below the 30% threshold as they have been for some years. In 5+A\*-C, the results did improve but were still a long way below the borough average.

The staff at the school, with a lot of support from Walsall Children's Services – Serco (WCS Serco), Black Country Challenge and the Council, has worked hard to help all children to achieve.

The numbers of children who have left outside the planned timetable means that by September 2010, there will only be 40 or fewer pupils in Year 9 for the final year of the school. Clearly with such a small number it will not be helpful to the children to try and maintain the current arrangements. Therefore the Cabinet, at its next meeting, will be asked to consider bringing forward the closure of the school by one year and finally closing the school in August 2011.

## **2 Outcomes at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5**

The performance of pupils in Walsall schools at GCSE has shown steady improvement over the years. This is a great credit to the young people, the staff in the schools and the support and challenge they have received. At the last Children and Young People's scrutiny panel, the 2010 unvalidated results in Walsall schools were reported.

Last week the Department for Education (DfE) published the first provisional validated results for GCSE for 2010. As expected this has amended the results slightly from those reported, and they will probably change slightly again when further iterations are published later in the academic year.

In Walsall the DfE table showed that Walsall had achieved the best results ever. At Key Stage 4, pupils achieving 5 + A\* - C GCSE or equivalent rose by 10% to 75%. The national average is also 75%. In 2002 Walsall schools achieved 42% against a national average of 52%. Over the 8 years since Walsall schools have improved by 33%, against a national improvement of 23%. The 2010 outcome is now on a par with our statistical neighbours (76%) and just below the West Midlands average (77%).

The more recent measure of 5 + A\* - C GCSE or equivalent including English and maths has also shown good improvement, both in Walsall and against the national average. This measure is now seen as the headline indicator of Key Stage 4 attainment. This year Walsall schools achieved their best results at 49%, an improvement of 5%. This has narrowed the gap again on the national average (53%). In 2005 Walsall schools achieved 35% against a national average of 43%. Since then, Walsall schools have improved by 14% against a national improvement of 10%. The 2010 outcome of 49% is still below the average of our statistical neighbours (52%) and the West Midlands (54%).

Whilst these results are very creditable there is still much progress to be made. WCS Serco is working hard in partnership with the secondary schools to make further impacts on the pupil outcomes, particularly at 5 + A\* - C GCSE or equivalent including English and maths, so that the gap with the national average continues to close and our comparison with local and statistical neighbours continues to improve. The work is also targeted to support and challenge all schools to perform as well as the best to reduce variation across the borough.

At Key Stage 5, again the first provisional validated results for GCE 'A' Level and equivalent were published last week. They show that providers of post 16 learning in Walsall improved in 2010 to an average point score of 644, an improvement of 5. There is considerable room for improvement as the national average is 733 for 2010. Point scores work by giving a value to each grade eg a grade C at 'A' Level is worth 210 points with the difference between grades of 30 points. Although the average for statistical neighbours (683) and the West Midlands (693) went down from 2009 to 2010, Walsall is still below and there is a lot of work going on to narrow this gap. To bridge this gap it would require an improvement of about one grade per subject entry for a 3 'A' level entry young person.

A more detailed report on post 16 learning has been prepared for the next Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel and that will give a broader range of outcomes including the Apprenticeship success rates, the national indicators for Level 2 (5+GCSE A\*-C) and the national indicators for Level 3 (2+'A' Levels). These all show improvement over time although the national indicators are still below the national average.

The partnership approach, involving not just schools but also other providers, seeks to learn from the best and to try to ensure that there is reduced variation between schools in different areas, whilst there is an overall improvement in standards and an improved comparison with statistical and local neighbours.

### **3 Post 16 Education and Looked After Children**

As stated above, a report on post 16 learning has been prepared for the next Scrutiny Panel. This area of learning is now part of the current contract with WCS Serco (it was not in the first contract). Much work has been done with providers in Walsall, both to increase participation of young people and to improve outcomes. There is enthusiasm from schools to cooperate with each other and with others to ensure that young people have a broad offer and are guided onto programmes that are appropriate to the young person and where they will have the best chance of success.

There is a lot of change in this area of work with the government making changes to the arrangements at various levels. At local level everyone continues to focus on looking at ways of working cooperatively to improve outcomes. There is still much to be done to reach where everyone would want to be and WCS Serco will continue to facilitate and support all partners in achieving the best opportunities for young people in Walsall.

The attainment of looked after children is closely monitored and there are a wide range of support programmes to help the children to achieve. In looking at statistics some caution must be used because of the small numbers. All the work is very much at an individual level based on the needs of the pupil.

With small cohorts of children, performance of looked after children can fluctuate year on year. The proportion of children with special educational needs in this group considerably exceeds that for the wider pupil population. For instance 71% of the Key Stage 4 cohort (49) who finished the key stage in summer 2010 had identified special educational needs. However, 92% still managed to achieve at least one GCSE A\*-G, 37% achieved 5+A\*-C GCSE and 12% achieved 5+A\*-C GCSE including English and maths. Whilst these results exceeded the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) predictions, we do, of course, still want the children to do as well as they possibly can.

At Key Stage 2 in 2010, 53% of the cohort (30) achieved Level 4+ in English and 50% in maths. Of this cohort 57% are identified as having special educational needs. The proportion of looked after children missing 25 days or more of school is 7.1% compared to a national average of 11.5%

The national comparators for the attainment of looked after children in Walsall over recent years are generally positive. Nevertheless there is no room for complacency as efforts are made to support the children. The Virtual School in Walsall is often used as an example of good practice and has been quoted in government guidelines. Maximising outcomes continues to drive the support by the Virtual School run by WCS Serco. The many support packages from 1:1 tuition, the homework club at Queen Mary Grammar School, the current project at Queen Mary High School, the Creating Chances programme, an early years project aimed at nursery and reception, a project with Wolverhampton University for secondary aged students are all there to support learning.

#### **4 Walsall Education Board/New Contract Monitoring Arrangements**

Walsall Education Board (WEB) was established by the Department for Education at the time to monitor the implementation and performance of Education Walsall, the education services provided by Serco. WEB was responsible for reporting the monitoring function directly to the Department for Education.

A new education contract commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008 with Walsall council providing the strategic leadership. The new contract includes robust governance arrangements to monitor the implementation and performance of the contract.

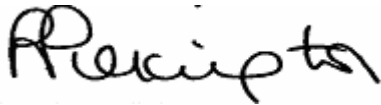
The Education Contract Board meets quarterly and is responsible for monitoring the performance outcomes. A report is taken from the Education Contract Board to the Executive Board, which is chaired by Walsall's Chief Executive and attended by The Leader of the Council and the Portfolio holder for Children's Services as well as senior officers of the council and Children's Services Serco.

A review is currently taking place of the Education Contract Output Specifications. The contract review has been agreed between Walsall Council and Serco based on:-

- a) The Government policy direction of devolving more autonomy to schools.
- b) The Government's public sector deficit reduction programme will result in a substantial reduction in the contract value (£1 million has already been removed in 2010-11).
- c) To focus on future service delivery, which will ensure continued improvement in educational attainment.

The process will be managed by a Contract Review Board, based on extending the existing Contract Management Board to include additional key stakeholders. Members from the three main political parties and the Director of Children's Services in both council and Serco will join this group. In addition, a stakeholder group has been convened to ensure all groups involved are consulted.

The Contract Review Board will meet monthly, the prime objective of this group will be to closely monitor and manage the progress of the Output Specification Review and make recommendations to the Executive Board on the future provision of education services in Walsall. The review process is taking place within a tight timescale in order that changes are completed for implementation at the start of the new financial year April 2011.



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Children's Services

29th October 2010