

Notes of meeting held at Dale Community Primary School on 26 November 2008.

Those present:

Councillors Sara Bolton (SB) and Pauline Latham (PL)

Linda Sullivan (LS), Head Teacher, Dale Community Primary School
Joan Stannard (JS), Head Teacher, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Kathleen Mayer (KM), Head Teacher, Castle Nursery School

Mahroof Hussain (MH) Chair of Governors for Dale School
David Romaine (DR) Scrutiny and Complaints Manager

After introductions there was some general discussion about the history of the extended school cluster which comprises Dale School, St Joseph's, St Chads, Stonehill Nursery and the Castle Nursery. LS said that the extended school cluster had been formed in mid 2005. She said the original plan had been to include Pear Tree and Arboretum but Normanton Road/Pear Tree Road formed a distinct geographical boundary and with the exception of Castle Nursery, all the school in the cluster were located within a triangle formed by Normanton/Pear Tree Road, Burton Road and the Ring Road.

Asked about the objectives of the extended schools cluster, LS said that these included:

- The delivery of a service outside school hours at all levels
- Child care
- Family support
- Balanced support and welfare

LS also referred to the provision of Children's Centres, extended school clubs, adult learning and child care provision in school holidays. She said that extended schools provided opportunities for enhanced teaching/learning by generating an environment for learning.

LS also said that the extended school group offered breakfast and out of school clubs and family learning opportunities.

JS and KM pointed out that these schools served quite diverse communities and this resulted in a different service demand at each of the schools. KM said that in the Castle Nursery area there was a bigger proportion of working parents who needed to drop their children off before they went on to work. JS said that in her school's area there were more mothers who stayed at home and that extended families were also involved in childcare.

All three head teachers confirmed that they had limited capacity to take on the extra work resulting from being in an extended school cluster. They said that

this was why it was important to have an effective extended school co-ordinator.

LS said that their original co-ordinator, who had been funded through a service level agreement with the YMCA, had been very good, but he had now moved on to a position as an extended schools officer with the City Council. LS said that they were working with the YMCA to find a suitable replacement for the co-ordinator. JS said that £2.5k of funding had been given by each school in the cluster in the first year (07-08) and this financial year a bid had also been made by the five schools for a worker.

There was some discussion about the importance of having co-ordinators and extended schools officers who understood the area and worked in the appropriate way. The head teachers said that the previous extended schools officer did not seem to understand the area and that this had an impact on the progress that they were able to make.

The issue of funding for the co-ordination officer prompted a discussion about the provision of funding and its sustainability. The head teachers said that as funds had to be bid for there was some uncertainty about what would be available and about the continuity of the funding. They said that this made it difficult to plan for future developments.

The head teachers said that funding was also post specific and time constrained. They said that because circumstances changed within the cluster this could mean that by the time the bid was approved and funding was provided, the need for a particular post might have changed. However, as the money was post specific it could not easily be used to fund a different post. They gave an example of the cluster bidding for a post of a Community Care worker but by the time funding had come through Stonehill Nursery had already employed 2.5 workers in Community Care posts.

LS pointed out that any funding that had not been used by the end of a financial year was removed and that there was no guarantee it would be made available in the following year. She said that the situation was made even more complicated because the schools in the cluster pooled funding to provide resources where they were needed.

The head teachers felt that the funding they were receiving was being allocated too late in the year to be fully useable. They said that they really needed to know by February what they were going to receive.

LS made the point that although the funding arrangement was difficult for the schools, the head teachers were unsure how the local authority could improve the situation as they often received the money late or there were additions to the original amount given. LS said that she believed this to be a fault of central government rather than the local authority.

The head teachers said that it was important for the co-ordinator to take into account the views and wishes of parents. They said their previous co-

ordinator had been a good communicator who had carried out detailed community consultation to understand community issues.

LS said that the extended school concept provided good support for parents which enabled them to get back to work or into education. This was especially true of the wrap round care provided by the nursery. However she said the need for parental support varied across the cluster area as in some parts there was support for parents through extended families. LS said at her school she had seen an increase in attendance at out of school clubs.

The head teachers all agreed that the local authority extended schools officer had a significant effect on the way in which extended schools developed. They felt that their cluster had started very well but that it had not have achieved as much as it might. The head teachers were of the view that they had been somewhat disadvantaged because they were doing quite well to start with. They said that the Council seemed to have concentrated on bringing poorer performing schools up to the standard of the cluster schools.

All the head teachers were of the opinion that they should be involved in the selection and appointment of the local authority extended schools officers. They said that this had not happened initially and they felt that the limited progress of their cluster was a result of having an extended schools officer who did not understand or appreciate their area.

The Commission members were surprised that schools did not have an input into the selection and appointment of the Council's extended schools officers and said they would raise this issue with the Director of the Children and Young People Department.

LS then outlined the problems that she and the other head teachers were having with the allocation and use of Pathfinder funding. LS said that Derby was part of the Pathfinder scheme and explained that this involved the Government allocating additional funding which was to be used to improve the quality of life of children in deprived areas.

LS said that under the scheme schools were allocated money for named children, who were identified according to a deprivation factor. LS said that there were 96 such children in Dale School and that she had been allocated £28k to spend on improving their quality of life. The money which amounted to around £300 per child had to be spent before August and could be used in a variety of ways, for example to pay for visits to sports centres, residential visits, or even visits to the theatre.

LS said that the cluster had asked the extended schools team whether it would be possible to provide cards that children in receipt of Pathfinder money could use at Moorways Sports Centre. However they had been told by the team that this could not be arranged.

The Commission members were told that there were restrictions on how the money could be used and that the parents of the children who received it did

not have funds to pay first and then reclaim the cost from the school. LS said that the money would be lost if it wasn't spent by August and it was not yet in her budget. Families and pupils qualifying for assistance under this scheme had not been informed by the local authority and it was felt that it might cause embarrassment for some proud families if they were approached by the school.

LS also said that the criteria for allocating the Pathfinder money seemed to follow no clear logic. Some families who were on benefit couldn't access the money and in some cases money was allocated to one child but not to his or her siblings. JS also reported that the list of children who were considered to be eligible for the money varied from issue to issue of the list and felt that the local authority should produce clear criteria on how the money could be spent

It was suggested that the Commission might ask the Local Government Association for guidance on the ways in which the Pathfinder money might be spent and on how it should be made available to the children on the list.

It was suggested by the head teachers that there might be benefit in organising out of school clubs which covered the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. It was felt that such clubs might provide children moving up to secondary school with an 'older friend' who could act as mentor to them during the transition. It was agreed that the possibility of funding for such an initiative was worthy of investigation.

The scale of charges for existing services was also discussed. LS said that charging presented problems because parents had come to see the extended services provided by the schools as essentially free. She felt that if charges were made the usage of the services was likely to fall.

It was agreed by the Commission members that there were three particular areas that the Commission should look into. These were:

- The failure to involve the schools in the recruitment for extended schools officer posts
- The timing of funding provided to the schools and other issues associated with it
- The Pathfinder funding and the ways in which it could be used.

JS said that all the head teachers were committed to and fully supported the concept of extended schools and that they got very excited about the possibilities. However the head teachers also said that although they fully supported the concept, it had increased work load and stress. They said that managers were needed to take on the day-to-day running of the extended school services and particularly for Child Care centres.

DRR 27 November 2008.