

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

COUNCILLOR DAVE HARLING

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
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SCHOOL VISITS

Over the last year I have visited many schools in the borough – Nursery, Primary (Infant and/or Junior) and Secondary, as well as St Thomas's Alternative Provision. This has deepened my understanding of the diversity of our schools and the issues they face on a daily basis. It has also confirmed my view that we have many outstanding schools that we should be rightly proud of.

Many children enter school at a lower level of development than children nationally but within just a few years they are moving on having achieved at or above the national average. The credit for this goes largely to the staff in our schools and the support services mainly provided by the Local Authority. And all of this has continued at a time of great financial pressures on the Council and at a time of great change in the education sector.

What schools in BwD have to contend with, that those schools in more affluent areas don't, is the wide range of issues that affect families here that are linked to poverty and deprivation, which can have a negative effect on the children going to our schools. The work with families carried out by our Heads and school staff is fantastic and every one of them deserves a Pat on the Back Award.

The changes to the National Curriculum are a massive challenge for our teachers, as are the changes made recently to the Ofsted inspection regime. This turbulent time is happening alongside a 'business as usual' attitude in schools.

This praise for our schools is not without recognising that some schools need help with improving their performance and should not be seen as a sign of complacency. Far from it, the biggest challenge facing the portfolio is to find new ways to provide the support needed for schools to continue to improve. This will be working in partnership with Heads and their schools, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Diocese, Academy Schools, Academy Trusts, Free Schools and anyone else who is involved in School Improvement in its widest sense.

OFSTED REGIME CHANGES

Across the country and as was predicted, under the new Ofsted framework, schools are being graded below the level they achieved under the previous inspection framework. It is increasingly difficult for schools to achieve a 'Good' outcome or to discuss the context of the school and its achievements with inspectors. Inspectors arrive with a very much more pre-determined view of a school's status, based solely on historical data. On arrival, inspectors are requesting additional progress data for every year group and for 'able and

talented', pupil premium, Special Education Need and ethnic groups. Sadly, the issues that make many of our schools outstanding do not appear to register with inspectors when it comes to giving an inspection grade.

Clearly the new agenda for Ofsted appears to be increasingly linked to the Pro-Academy stance of the current government and some of our schools have been the victim of their inconsistent judgements. We know locally that over the last 15 years all the schools that have been to be in the lowest Ofsted category have improved without the need for conversion to an academy.

END OF YEAR EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS

We are within a few weeks of the end of the academic year and there are many events being held to celebrate the achievements of the children in our schools. I hope many of you will have had the chance to join them, as local governors or relatives of pupils. I will mention just a few that have happened recently that have been organised for a number of years on a cross-borough basis. The Mini and Big Sing events were held in King George's Hall, with the annual Rockfest held at Blackburn Central High School. I will report on these further at the Council Forum.

CHILDREN'S AND FAMILIES ACT IMPLICATIONS

The Children & Families Act has been passed into law and will come into force in September 2014. It covers areas such as adoption & contact, family justice, childcare and child welfare, and children and young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND).

The SEND part of the legislation has been the focus for Schools and Education, along with the SEND Code of Practice which is statutory guidance to accompany the Act. The Code is currently in draft, with the final version due to be published in June 2014.

Key changes in the new SEND legislation and Code are:

- New requirement for local authorities, health and care services to commission services jointly for special educational needs and disability
- Local authorities to publish a clear, transparent 'local offer' of services
- More streamlined assessment process, co-ordinated across education, health and care
- New 0-25 age range Education, Health and Care plans for those with more complex needs
- New statutory protections for young people aged 16-25 in further education
- A new duty on health commissioners to deliver the agreed health elements of Education, Health and Care plans
- The option of a personal budget for families and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan

Briefings are being held throughout June for partners across education, social care, health and other services to highlight the changes and new responsibilities being placed on us all.

UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS UPDATE

The government announced in September 2013, that all pupils in Key Stage 1 will be entitled to a free school meal (FSM). Many schools were unable to deliver the meals required and inspections of all maintained schools have taken place. A programme of works has been identified to ensure that all schools will have the capacity to deliver the number of dinners required. These works have been commissioned and will be undertaken and completed during the summer holidays.

The department has centrally co-ordinated all the necessary equipment for the schools to ensure delivery and economies of scale.

A negative impact of this initiative has been the threat to Pupil Premium for primary schools, which is dependent on the take-up of the current benefits based FSM provision. An awareness campaign is underway aimed at parents to encourage them to still apply for FSM even though their children will already be entitled to a free meal. Leaflets for all primary pupils have been produced and will be distributed during the second half of the Summer Term and if necessary again in the Autumn Term.