

**Minutes of the Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Board**

**27th September, 2018 at 5.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Underhill (Chair);
Councillors S Davies and M Y Hussain (Vice-Chairs);
Councillors Allen, Ashman, M Hussain, Phillips,
Rollins, and Shaeen.

Apologies: Councillor Hevican, Reverend P French and Mrs T
Majid (co-opted members).

In attendance: Chris Ward – Director Education, Skills and
Employment;
Melanie Barnett – Group Head Safeguarding
Assessment Team
Paul Hayward - Team Manager, Learning and
Culture -School Organisation & Planning
Martyn Roberts – Team Leader Planning
Moira Tallents - SEN Advisor, Children & Young
Peoples Services

21/18

**Proposed expansion of The Westminster School, Rowley
Campus, Curral Road, Rowley Regis, West Midlands (Key
Decision Ref. No. SMBC0309)**

The Chair advised the Board that she had requested the proposal to expand capacity of The Westminster School to come to Scrutiny Board to discuss the outcome of the statutory consultation exercise and options available.

The Director Education, Skills and Employment advised that the reason for the report going to Cabinet before scrutiny was purely about timing of meetings. He advised that the options proposed built on the last two years of work with EVOLVE, working towards the expansion of The Westminster School, and that if the decision had not been made at Cabinet on 19th September, 2018, the Council was legally required to refer the matter to the schools' adjudicator for decision. He

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highlighted that the Council was keen to have local decisions for local schools.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- There had been a 23% increase in Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) to 2000 per annum.
- The Education Authority was having to increase the number of specialist school places.
- Consideration had been given as to what additional provision was required and what could be better utilised within our existing schools.
- There was a need to look at expansion of 6th form provision.
- The Council had worked closely with The Westminster School to consider three sites.
- It was proposed to expand The Westminster School into the adjoining educational building occupied by Whiteheath Education Centre. Other buildings would have been too preventative and expensive, that is why the preferred option was for the school to move into the adjacent Whiteheath Education Centre double storey building as this could happen very quickly.
- The proposal impacted directly on the Whiteheath Education Centre which would have to relocate to another site.
- The expansion would lead to more young people with disabilities in Sandwell being able to attend a special school for Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD).
- The site in Tipton proposed for Whiteheath had previously been used as a school facility and minor adjustments, changes and adaptations had been highlighted in a letter received from the Centre to make the site user friendly.
- The Headteacher was recently appointed and was said to be open to change. She had seen the potential to adjust and decorate the building to meet the needs for the relocation of the Centre. A different approach would be taken, to work with half of the young people in the building while others were out working off site thereby offering the same level of support whilst rationalising the building.
- The Whiteheath Education Centre had a £250,000 surplus last year. The Headteacher could offer respite care and different ways of working. This was something there was no detail on yet however it was hoped that some children could be helped to re-integrate into mainstream school earlier.

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- The Management Committee of Whiteheath Education Centre did not have the same right of appeal under the regulations as a governing body of a school subject to a prescribed alteration.
- Many special schools had a good budget. Schools Forum could review school carry forward and there would always be challenge. The Council was trying to achieve a system change.
- The Council would meet with the Head Teacher of Whiteheath Education Centre at the Tipton Campus to agree a programme of works for the unit. The unit was fully accessible. The Board was advised that there was a potential issue with a connecting fire door with Q3 Academy Tipton, but that fire officers were looking at their options to resolve the problem.
- The Director advised that the proximity of the nursery was a real opportunity for the young people from Whiteheath Education Centre to work with children.

The Board asked further questions and was advised as follows:

- There had been two parts to the consultation period; the first part resulted in 650 positive responses from parents and the community; the second part was the statutory notice process when some concerns had been raised and passed to Cabinet.
- The Director advised that it was always difficult when an Education Authority wanted to move a school from one site to another.
- The Board was advised that Partners were very positive, looking at getting more Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) children into work and living independently and that the future looked good for Sandwell as a community and for the future of Sandwell.
- The Partnership was happy to have a school willing to push young people to achieve their best at a young age, sometimes it was considered that parents could be overprotective.
- The Sandwell Community School Tipton had been a Pupil Referral Unit for 7 years and would need refurbishing. The Whiteheath Education Centre had been based at the Rowley Campus for 7 years.

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- There would be no additional travel costs to transport young people around the Borough.
- There would be a significant difference in the way the adjacent secondary school, Q3 Academy Tipton would be run now that the Academy Trust had taken over its management. It would take a year or two but the Centre needed to be used as part of the campus of learning. It would keep evolving as it moved on.

The Chair thanked officers for presenting the report and responding to questions. She advised that matters raised would be brought to the attention of Cabinet in a briefing note.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive the report and that the comments and observations of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board be referred to the Cabinet Member for information.

(Meeting ended at 5.32pm)

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