

Dear Headteacher/Chair of Governors

RE: Department for Education White Paper: Educational Excellence Everywhere

I am sure that you will be aware that the DfE published a White Paper last month Educational Excellence Everywhere. In case you have not seen it I have enclosed the summary that was circulated by the LGiU.

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools to explain the position that the County Council will be taking with regard to the views expressed in the White Paper. It is important that I stress from the outset that I believe we already have excellent outcomes for the vast majority of our children and young people in Lancashire. Last month the proportion of our schools which are Good or Outstanding exceeded 90%. This is down to your leadership and the hard work of all your staff. The Local Authority through its school improvement services will continue to support you in this improvement.

We recognise that there are differences in attainment across Lancashire and that there are areas where we need collectively to improve further. The size of the County means that an average can disguise district variations and we are not complacent around the need to improve outcomes for all our children and young people.

The Local Authority is the Corporate Parent for our Children Looked After (CLA). In my role as Cabinet Member you would expect to have a particular focus on this group and it is one of our key priorities. The DfE validated data on CLA was released on 24 March and on all the key measures Lancashire's performance increased substantially. It is particularly pleasing to note that the attainment of our CLA was above the national average at all Key Stages for 2015.

I would like to thank you for your work in improving the outcomes for CLA pupils. I am sure that you would agree that there is still a significant gap between the attainment of CLA pupils and all pupils educated in the County and we will continue to work with you to address this.

It is in this context that I would wish to refer to the White Paper. The White Paper proposes that:

"By the end of 2020, all schools will be academies or in the process of becoming academies; by the end of 2022."

County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools
Lancashire County Council PO Box 100 County Hall Preston PR1 0LD

This timeframe is a lengthy one and would take us beyond the next General Election and into the next Parliament. In any context this is a considerable amount of time and ought to allow for some reflection and consideration before any individual decision is taken.

It is further worth noting that the previous model of 'stand alone' Single Academy Trusts has been abandoned by the Government. The White Paper does not envisage that this will mean large numbers of Single Academy Trusts (SATS) but rather a smaller number of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs).

The White Paper states:

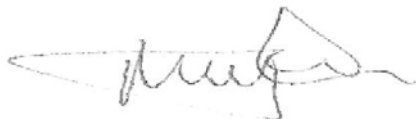
"Promote greater collaboration between schools, particularly through MATs; it is expected most schools will join MATs as they become academies and that many existing single academy trusts (SATs) will set up or join MATs."

Lancashire views all of its schools whatever their status (i.e. academies, trusts, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and community schools) as equally important. They all serve the children and young people of Lancashire. We will continue to provide School Improvement Services on a traded basis through the School Service Guarantee or Service Level Agreement to schools. This is a long established model in Lancashire which has, through partnership, developed excellent outcomes. We have said on numerous occasions that we will deliver this model as long as schools wish, current buy back figures show that over 95% of schools buy our services and this figure continues to grow.

We will begin dialogue with you through our existing channels of Primary Heads in Lancashire (PHIL) groups, Lancashire Association of Secondary Heads (LASSH), Lancashire Special Schools Headteachers Association (LASSHTA) and Nursery School Headteachers around the thinking outlined in the White Paper. We will also pick this up through the cross phase Sounding Board Group. Additionally we will be using the Diocesan Liaison Group to speak to Diocesan colleagues as to their thinking and approaches. You will be aware that over half the schools in the County are Diocesan Schools.

Politically, the Council remain resolutely opposed to any school being forced to become an Academy against the wishes of the Head Teacher, Governors and Parents. We are preparing to look at a range of options but I would counsel, most strongly, against a rapid rush to find immediate solutions to what is an emerging and changing issue. Lancashire has a long history of working with its schools and securing sustainable school improvement. We will continue to be there for you and are committed to supporting you. Thank you for taking the time to read this, I would welcome any comments. I hope the rest of the summer term goes well.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Tomlinson', written over a faint dotted line.

County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools