



FARRINGTON COMMUNITY SPORTS COLLEGE & Bede Sixth Form Academy

EXCELLENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

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6th October 2009

Dr Helen Paterson
Director of Children's Services
Children's Services Leadership Team
Room 4.37
Civic Centre
Sunderland

Dear Dr Paterson

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposal that Houghton Kepier Sports College raise the upper age limit to provide sixth form education. I object to the proposal and offer the following information for your consideration.

My objection is not to the provision of sixth form education on school sites in principle, rather that in the current educational setting within Sunderland opening a sixth form provision at HKSC would not be appropriate and could indeed be damaging for the wider educational partnership in Sunderland.

I am sure you are aware that the development of a sixth form provision on the HKSC site is not supported by the majority of secondary schools within the city. Many Headteachers and Governors agree that the proposal could have a destabilising influence on partnership working across the secondary sector. A number of schools regard this proposal as a threat to the current status quo and a disregard for the existing post 16 arrangements and framework. Put simply, if the HKSC proposal were to go ahead other schools may feel forced to follow. If that were the case I believe the current post 16 arrangements in Sunderland would end with a consequent detrimental effect on the majority of young people across our city.

For many years the majority of Sunderland's Community Secondary schools have agreed with the principle that they would remain 11-16 schools. Joint sixth forms would be provided by clusters of schools working in collaboration with the City of Sunderland College. Four new joint sixth forms have been established in recent years with the latest being the Headways sixth form for the Coalfields area. Each sixth form offers a wide range of courses and reflects many of the values and principles which you aspire to achieve in your consultation document. I believe that the new sixth forms have succeeded in providing high quality education for our students and provide equality of opportunity for all. Schools are very much involved in the running of the sixth forms with joint Governance arrangements and Associate Principal roles given to Heads. Students who attend give very positive accounts of their experiences and are successful in their studies.

The current arrangements were encouraged by the Tomlinson Report and the Local Authority 14-19 Area Development Plan. Both documents promote partnership working 14-19. Indeed, the desire for schools in Sunderland to adhere to the principals of partnership working influenced the 'Sunderland Model' for the new academies opening within the city. The Academies have agreed to operate within the existing 16-19 partnership arrangements. The concern would be that were HKSC to go ahead with its proposals, the new academies may well be forced to review that commitment with a consequent effect on their neighbouring schools.



I am not convinced that the HKSC proposal would provide 'an alternative model of sixth form provision' as suggested in the proposal. The proposal details a very similar model of provision to that already provided within the existing sixth forms. Indeed, the course offer replicates much of that which is already provided within the partner sixth forms. The stated aims and rationale of the proposed sixth form reflect those already established within the existing partnerships. I question the extent to which the HKSC proposal would be unique or different or be a 'more diverse, varied and relevant learning experience'?

I have some practical concerns relating to the viability of a sixth form provision at HKSC. Falling secondary school roles across Sunderland including the coalfields area has inevitably reduced the number of students looking for post 16 provision. In some subjects for example languages, there are currently concerns that there are too few students to make courses viable within existing institutions. I believe this will continue to be the case in 'shortage' subjects and that to open an additional facility at HKSC will threaten the viability of existing courses in other sixth forms. Given the reduced current demand I would question the need to add further 'supply' by opening a new provision.

The statutory changes for schools to provide training and education for all 16-19 year olds in the near future will of course create some additional demand particularly for level 1 and 2 courses. However, partnership working offers the best opportunity to provide a sustainable and viable range of courses for those students. Schools are currently developing specialist provision in partnership with COSC to ensure high quality courses at level 1, 2 and 3. This provision is best provided and sustained by combining resources and 'pooling' students to ensure course viability. The HKSC proposal replicates that provision and arguably, offers nothing new. The student numbers given in the HKSC proposal give cause for concern since it is difficult to see how the full range of courses quoted in the proposal could be maintained. I would expect some reduction in the offer made to HKSC students given the low numbers generated, unless of course there is an expectation that courses will be supplemented by students from outside HKSC. This would threaten the viability of the courses and provision currently being offered.

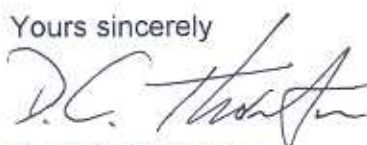
Further, the proposal would appear to suggest that the schools falling 11-16 role and consequent reduction in budget, could in some part be 'off set' by the increase in students numbers post 16. The proposal suggests that spare capacity in staff and resources intended for 11-16 delivery could be re-directed to post 16 provision. It is my understanding that this would not be acceptable given that revenue and capital funding intended for 11-16 provision should be spent on 11-16 students and not used for post 16 provision. This would seriously call into question the proposals set out in the feasibility study, in particular the assertion that no capital funding would be required since the original capital funding was awarded for 11-16 students.

The benefits of sixth form working for staff and students, is accepted. However those benefits already exist in the current situation where school staff teach in the joint sixth forms and continue their professional association with student's post 16.

The wishes of parents are of great importance when considering the range of provision a school makes for learners. In this case however, I am concerned that the information given to parents about post 16 opportunities has been limited. I would ask that full information about the current partnership arrangements with COSC is provided to parents, staff and students to enable a full understanding of all the options open to HKSC students within the existing arrangements. The feasibility study appears simply to be a justification for the schools desire to open a sixth form rather than a full consideration of all the factors involved.

I would urge the Local Authority to oppose the sixth form proposal made by Houghton Kesper Sports College.

Yours sincerely



Mr D.C. Thornton
Headteacher