



Leading learning and skills

Dr Helen Paterson
 Director of Children's Services
 Sunderland City Council
 Civic Centre
 Sunderland SR2 7DN

12 October 2009

Dear Helen

Houghton Kepier Sports College - Statutory Proposal

In July 2009 we were invited to respond to Houghton Kepier's proposal to introduce a Sixth Form from September 2010. At that stage we felt unable to support the proposal. I am presenting here for your information the comments that were made in response to the specific questions raised in the July consultation. I can confirm that we have not altered our position since that time.

Our principal concerns relate to:

- The feasibility of delivering a broad curriculum offer that will give learners an appropriate degree of choice
- The relationship of this proposal to the agreed Sunderland model for non-faith post 16 V1th Form provision ie Collaborative V1th Forms
- The broader context of the development – including falling demographic trend and overall mix and balance of provision within the Authority

The feasibility of delivering a broad curriculum offer

The range of provision proposed in the consultation document appeared to be unfeasibly broad [c30 Level 3 subjects, at level 2 13 vocational options in addition to English, maths and other GCSEs as demanded, at level 1 c15 options] in the context of a projected initial cohort size of 100 per year group. The staffing, premises, facilities and other resource requirements would be extremely challenging. To maintain financial viability choice may need to be restricted and this could have a detrimental effect on participation/retention/achievement and progression in the longer term.

The existing model operating in Sunderland seeks to combine the virtues of Sixth Forms which have a specific identity with which young people can readily identify

region

area

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with the breadth of provision made possible through the critical mass that characterises the tertiary arrangement.

The relationship of this proposal to the agreed Sunderland model

The Sunderland model is predicated on the idea that a dispersed model is the most appropriate model for the City's Sixth Form provision and that this model can promote increased participation. The collaborative VIth Forms are currently located in 3 areas of the City, at Usworth, at St Peter's and at Bede. Until 2008, the Bede Campus accommodated two Sixth Forms, the St Peter's Sixth Form and the Bede Sixth Form. From September 2009, the College has located the Headways Sixth Form and the Bede Sixth Form at the Bede Campus. Participation post 16 has increased year on year within this arrangement. The College provides a "non denominational" provision within which chaplaincy services can be delivered to those students who seek them. The faith Sixth Forms provide 3 distinct learning environments in that 2 are single sex and 1 is co-educational. The collaborative VIth Forms have gained the support of virtually all of the schools. As far as we are aware, only Houghton Kesper is seeking to implement a separate arrangement. In Sunderland, the Academies have also been developed as "up to 16" institutions in recognition and support of the established model.

Given the degree of choice that currently exists, we do not believe that there is a need to extend the range of VIth Forms serving the City beyond these 7.

The broader context of the development

Whilst we support the *objectives of the proposal* in respect of encouraging participation, supporting achievement and enhancing progression we are not convinced that this development is an appropriate response to progressing those priorities and meeting the challenges. As stated earlier, our primary concerns relate to the position of this development within the Sunderland context, the falling demographics, and the need to ensure breadth and quality of provision within a value for money model. This last relies to a significant degree on being able to bring together a critical mass of learners.

In our response to the school's consultation document we also raised as an issue our desire to understand more clearly why the school remains reluctant to explore the collaborative model as an option for developing VIth Form provision for young people in the coalfields area.

I hope that you will find these comments constructive and helpful in supporting your decision making process. Please feel free to contact me again if you require any further clarification on any of the points presented.

Yours sincerely

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