

**Response to Houghton Kepier Sports College Statutory Proposal to increase the upper age limit to 19 to enable the provision of 6<sup>th</sup> Form education.**

In July 2009 the Local Education Authority was invited to respond to a proposal for Houghton Kepier Sports College to increase the upper age limit to 19 to enable the provision of 6<sup>th</sup> Form education. As the Director of Children's Services I was unable at that time to support the proposal. This remains the position. The key reasons for this are:

The development of 6<sup>th</sup> Form provision would challenge, undermine and potentially destabilise the current 14-19 partnership arrangements across the City. Furthermore, I do not believe that the proposal would enable the young people of Houghton Kepier School to benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum offer.

The 14-19 Partnership in Sunderland was recently judged by OFSTED as having outstanding capacity to deliver the Government's 14-19 reforms and it is through this partnership that we will collectively increase the number of learners engaged in learning post 16. In partnership, a full range of appropriate 14-19 learning pathways can be developed and delivered through collaboration. This is believed to be the most effective way of ensuring that youngsters are encouraged to remain in education and training. The Local Authority's approach on this is in line with and is supported by the strategic aims and objectives of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

It is extremely difficult for a single school working alone to expand its range of educational and training opportunities. The proposed curriculum outlined by the consultant in the feasibility study attached to Houghton Kepier's proposal carries no evidence based analysis and therefore the proposal cannot be shown to be either affordable or indeed feasible.

Whilst I would support the rationale and aims of the original documentation, clearly it is difficult to disagree with an aim to reduce NEET and provide first class learning opportunities, I do not believe that the school can achieve this in isolation. An alternative method of governance does not in itself increase choice and diversity for young people. Choice and diversity will be increased through collaborative arrangements that enable staff from schools to teach post 16.

It is not clear how the Governing Body intends to meet the challenges around revenue and capital resources for the proposed 6<sup>th</sup> Form facilities. I would suggest that the current school does not have sufficient accommodation and that to be financially viable choice may need to be restricted in terms of the curriculum on offer.

In 2006 the Governing Body of Houghton Kepier School agreed to a proposal to develop 16-19 provision with Hetton School. Some months later Houghton Kepier School decided to leave the partnership and Hetton School and Seaham School, County Durham have continued to develop and establish the

Headways 6<sup>th</sup> Form. An appropriate site for this provision, which is temporarily located at Bede Centre on Durham Road, is actively being sought. I understand that the Seaham-Hetton Partnership is keen for Houghton Kepier School to rejoin them and so I reiterate my offer to broker a meeting to re-establish this link. I believe that this option would be in the best interest of the learners of Houghton Kepier School to promote first class learning opportunities, viability, choice and fit for purpose accommodation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Paterson', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Dr Helen Paterson**  
**Executive Director of Children's Services**  
9<sup>th</sup> October 2009