

Briefing Paper for Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

How the David Young Community Academy fits into the Provision of Children's Services in Leeds

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The David Young Community Academy (DYCA) opened in Seacroft in East Leeds in September 2006. It is the only academy in Leeds and as such has developed an innovative contribution as an educational institution within the spectrum of children's services in Leeds. This paper seeks to highlight some of these elements.

2 Background

- 2.1 The strategic content and legal distinctions resulting from the allocation of academy status were outlined in the briefing paper which informed the scrutiny enquiry on trust in schools in February 2007. The Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF) indicate in their prospectus on academies that

Academies are all ability, independent state schools with a mission to transform education where a status quo is simply not good enough.

Independent status is crucial to enable academies to succeed. Strong, ambitious leadership, effective management, high aspirations for all young people, and good teaching are essential ingredients for any school.

- 2.2 Increasingly the role of local authorities is changing from "provider" of services to "commissioning" provision that meets the needs of the community it serves. Where academies work in partnership with the local authority, they tend to have a significant additional impact on outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.3 Education Leeds, on behalf of the City Council, worked with the DCSF to commission the DYCA sponsored by the Church of England. The DYCA is oversubscribed.
- 2.4 The Executive Board of the City Council has recently agreed that consultation be undertaken on the potential to establish further academies in Leeds. The paper considered by the Executive Board on this is included elsewhere on the Board's agenda as part of the report on 14-19 review..

3 The Benefits of this Model in Leeds

- 3.1 As the only academy in Leeds, the community of schools and other children's services partners have sometimes struggled to understand the separate legal duties and responsibilities vested in an academy. This section considers two specific unique legal duties and indicates, from the perspective of Education Leeds, the willingness of DYCA to operate as an active partner in raising outcomes for children.
- 3.2 Admissions
- 3.2.1 The DYCA has been able to set its own admissions policy and a set of unique admissions criteria. This is based on Government guidance and meets the requirements of the Schools Admissions Code. The unique element of the criteria is that the DYCA have sought to establish, through the application of "fair banding", a

more normal distribution of ability on entry. This enables the DYCA to offer a truly comprehensive educational experience to its young people. Throughout the development and application of these admissions criteria, the DYCA has sought to consult and engage with Education Leeds. It is important to note that, given the level of oversubscription, the DYCA is beginning to operate as a local community school for the Seacroft area.

3.2.2 The DYCA has accepted some of Education Leeds proposed amendments to the admission criteria published for the 2008/09 academic year. The DYCA is legally exempt from accepting in-year admissions during its first full two years of operation. However, the DYCA has taken new arrivals to the United Kingdom as new in-year admissions. The DYCA has also been proactive in working with Education Leeds and demonstrating a willingness to work in collaboration and partnership with local schools within agreed local policies and procedures.

3.3 Sharing Information

3.3.1 Notwithstanding the additional bureaucratic burden it places on the DYCA, they have been very keen to share information with Education Leeds in addition to that which it is statutorily required to report directly to Government. Thus Education Leeds has very good arrangements with the DYCA that ensures that we are aware of children subject to fixed term or permanent exclusions.

3.3.2 The DYCA chose to share Key Stage 3 and GCSE outcomes with Education Leeds. This data does not contribute to judgements about the performance of schools in Leeds because the DCSF exclude academies from the data reported on the performance of schools. However, the DYCA's willingness to share its information has enabled us to confirm the real progress made by the young people the DYCA have inherited from predecessor schools.

3.4 School Year

3.4.1 The most noticeable impact introduced to Leeds by the DYCA was the shift in the start of their school year from September to June. This means young people leave primary school immediately after Key Stage 2 SATS in May and begin their secondary school experience in Year 7 without losing progress between the two phases over the summer recess. Initial feedback from partner primary schools appears to be positive about this. Education Leeds is keen to establish a formal piece of longitudinal academic research to assess the impact of this shift on children's progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

3.5 School Timetable

3.5.1 The DYCA offers a radically different structure to the school day of that available in any other secondary school in the city. The timetable sees the school day operate from 8:30 to 4:35 in three sessions. Every young person attends session one and two Monday to Friday. All the young people are encouraged to participate in session three at least one day a week.

3.6 Personalisation

3.6.1 The DYCA have developed a sophisticated personalised curriculum for every young person. This enables them to progress through the curriculum at their own pace, not necessarily at the end of every academic year. It is supported by a focussed professional pastoral support system that considers the needs of the whole child, not

just their academic or learning needs. The linking of this pastoral approach with a strong achievement focus has already had an impact on engaging young people who were previously disengaged by school. There is an expectation that it will also stretch the high achievers in the DYCA. The success of this approach can be seen in their GSCE results 2007.

3.7 14-19 Curriculum Offer

3.7.1 The DYCA have developed, in advance of most other schools in Leeds, a unique approach to the development of the curriculum offer for 14 – 19-year olds. They use their specialism, the built environment, to focus vocational and academic opportunities, post-16. They use a critical relationship with the College of Building to ensure that both the vocational and academic pathways post-14 are always high quality provision, personalised to maximise the achievement of every young person.

3.8 Summary

3.8.1 The DYCA has been keen to share their approach to the school day, their curriculum offer, and their pastoral support systems with other schools in Leeds. They have indicated to Education Leeds on numerous occasions, their willingness to act as a lead partner in the Leeds School Improvement Policy to support other schools in difficulty.

4 Issues

4.1 The DYCA reported the highest number of permanent exclusions and the lowest attendance in the last school year. This is a significant cause for concern for both the DYCA and Education Leeds. Detailed tracking of the young people who were persistent non-attendeers and those young people subject to permanent exclusion suggest that this problem is a legacy from the predecessor schools. One of the predecessor schools had been for four years the most underperforming school in the city. The focus the DYCA brought to identifying every young person they have responsibility for has enabled the DYCA to assist Education Leeds to track a significant number of young people who previously had been lost to the education system. Education Leeds is now using this information with other children's services partners to plan for alternative provision that engages these young people in learning.

5.2 Because of the freedom the DYCA has from the legal duties and obligations that fall upon other schools, it has struggled to gain acceptance within the community of schools as a valued partner. Education Leeds is confident that this cultural issue will dissipate quickly as the effective contribution provided by the DYCA to the children's services agenda in Leeds becomes better understood, and the outcomes for children and young people are improved.