

David Young Community Academy – Scrutiny Board Discussion – November 2007

Pat Toner (Strategic Manager, Education Leeds) attended to discuss the report with members.

He began by highlighting two issues. Firstly that the DYCA has a different school year to the Local Authority, with holidays at different times. Secondly that the report was produced with cooperation from the DYCA and that they had undertaken to provide any additional information requested by members.

Members asked questions on the following issues:

- The process by which it is decided whether a student will follow either an academic or a vocational route
- The number of permanent exclusions
- The level of attendance
- How 'Session Three' fits in to the school's offer
- The impact of the new school year structure
- The issue of Unions and staff turnover
- The role of the Extended Schools Coordinator
- The level of support in place for parents.

Pat Toner responded to these points as follows:

Academic or vocational route – It was pointed out that the students themselves generally make the decision as to which course they will take. The DYCA is not alone in attempting to 'personalise' courses of study for students. Any issues around the relative value of academic or vocational qualifications are more likely to come from adults than from the students themselves. The DYCA is asked to provide a more detailed response on how the options system works for their students, and whether there are any significant variations from the systems in place in other secondary schools in the city.

Permanent exclusions – While some members felt that the high level of exclusions was understandable, others were concerned about the validity of these exclusions and the impact which they may have on the young people themselves and the wider community. The board requested more detailed information on the reasons for each exclusion, and the current placement of each excluded student.

Attendance – It was explained that the low attendance figures were partly caused by a significant number of persistent non-attendees at Braim Wood and Agnes Stewart Schools. The DYCA has worked closely with Education Leeds to track down these individuals and help them to integrate into the school where possible.

Session Three – It was explained that although the session is optional, a high number of pupils do attend, and there is a strong expectation within the school that they will do so. It was also pointed out that the purpose of session three is to provide an additional 'off-timetable' opportunity for learning, particularly geared towards those students who might not receive a great deal of support for their studies at home. Therefore making the session compulsory would be contradictory.

School year structure – The DYCA is the first school in the city to introduce a different holiday structure. However, as the number of academies is likely to increase this situation may be repeated, and important lessons can be learnt from the way that the DYCA has handled the situation. There is a particular potential problem where children from the same family are at both the DYCA and a primary school with a different holiday structure. However, the DYCA has worked hard to establish good relationships with nearby primary schools on this and other issues. For its part, Education Leeds has undertaken to carry out some research on the impact of different holidays, and also to liaise closely with any new academies when they are developing a holiday structure.

Union representation – The DYCA has a different relationship to unions compared with other schools in the city. While some members of staff do belong to a union members can only call on a union representative on site if they are involved in a disciplinary or grievance procedure. Board members requested figures for staff turnover.

Extended Schools Coordinator – Pat Toner was unable to provide any information on the involvement of the Extended Schools Coordinator with the DYCA. The board would appreciate further information on this.

Support available to parents – Again, Pat Toner was unable to comment, and the board would like to request some more detailed information from the DYCA.

In conclusion, it was established that while the DYCA does differ significantly from other secondary schools in Leeds, in most cases attempts are being made to ensure that the relationship with Education Leeds and the rest of the Leeds schools ‘family’ runs smoothly. One member of the board suggested that it was not just a case of the DYCA fitting in with the rest of the city, but that this should be a two way process, with Leeds schools learning lessons from the DYCA – particularly in view of the school’s greatly improved GCSE results.

The board concluded that a further session, attended by a representative from the Academy, would be extremely useful.