

# Public Document Pack

## **Supplementary Information for 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009 Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)**

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## **Visit to Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and Hunslet Children's Centre Monday 9th February 2009**

### **Attending:**

*Scrutiny Board Members*  
Cllr G Driver

*Scrutiny Support*  
Laura Nield

*Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and Hunslet Children's Centre*  
Mark Ford – Head Teacher  
Lesley Crampton – Children's Centre Manager

- Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and Hunslet Children's Centre are very closely linked, with one of the Children's Centre's two sites being situated alongside the school.
- Local primary schools were involved with the Children's Centre management in discussions from the time when the Centre was first proposed.
- Other staff were also encouraged to make links before any building work started.
- From the beginning, a decision was made to have one 'foundation stage unit'. This contains a mixture of Early Years and Primary school children, and the staff also come from both the Children's Centre and the school.
- The two organisations developed a 'shared vision' and there was a strong focus on developing good relationships between staff, with a sense of joint ownership.
- Staff worked together to merge different methods of teaching, to create a seamless transition from the Children's Centre to the school.
  
- Both the primary school and the Children's Centre have an excellent reputation locally, which has been enhanced by their joint working.
- They also have an equal relationship – they can negotiate on key issues and will both stand up for their own priorities.
- Good relationships at management level are seen as crucial to their success.
- In addition, both sides are convinced that joint working is the right thing to do, and this attitude has filtered down to all of the staff.
- Initially there was a certain amount of opposition from some governors and staff, but this has now been resolved.
  
- The relationships with other schools in the cluster were discussed.
- They were included in the early stages of planning, and initially it was intended to have 26 Early Years places at St Mary's and a further 26 at Low Road Primary. However, this did not happen.
- Low Road now have a separate nursery.
- Every year so far, the Children's Centre has filled all of its places and has had to turn children away.
- Parents are very keen to send their children to a Children's Centre rather than a sessional nursery due to the 'wrap-around-care' on offer.

- The number of places on offer to the youngest children are limited, as staff want to ensure that they will be able to offer these children continuous care all the way through to primary school. If more places were available at the second stage then more places could be offered to under 3's.
- At present, attending the Children's Centre does not give a child any priority when applying for a place at the primary school. As a result, some children are having to go to school elsewhere despite having been at the Children's Centre for years. If possible the school would like to change the admissions criteria to help avoid this problem.
- Some efforts have been made to work with other primary schools so that the children have a continuous experience. However, most would prefer to stay at St Mary's if possible.
- Governance arrangements at the Children's Centre consist of an advisory board, with representatives from school governors, teachers (from St Mary's and Low Road), parents, Health service representatives etc.
- However, the school governors at St Mary's have overall responsibility for the part of the Children's Centre which is on the same site.
- There is no demarcation between the two organisations in terms of budget. The two groups of staff share resources.
- Funding is decided each year by a complex formula, put together by Education Leeds. The Children's Centre effectively pays the school 'rent' for their use of the building. The formula may change next year as in the past the Children's Centre has been open for longer hours than the school, but from September onwards the school will have longer hours too, as part of the Extended Schools programme.
- There is no real clash between the different cultures of Early Years and Primary. Having all the Foundation Stage children together in one class helps to avoid this and all the staff also meet each week to discuss the curriculum and iron out any difficulties. This also benefits those children from more challenging families, as staff can discuss any concerns they may have.
- The class is taught by a Foundation Stage teacher, who has experience both of primary and early years. This also helps in bridging the gap between the two.
- All the work that the Foundation Stage class do is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage principles.
- Partnerships with parents are also seen as very important.
- At this stage it is difficult to measure the long term impact on the children. However, over the past two years children in the Foundation Stage have scored highly in the 'Personal, social and emotional' category, which is seen as the key to later academic success.
- Anecdotally, staff also feel that the new arrangements have made safeguarding much easier as the links between different organisations and 'joined up working' are far more explicit.
- A lot of outreach work is run from the Children's Centre so families are accessing the school for health services and play sessions. This makes engaging with problem families much easier as the school is seen as a community hub and parents are involved from an early stage.

- Both organisations work hard to make the transition between Children’s Centre and school as smooth as possible, and also to ease the transition from reception to year one. Children gradually become accustomed to the life of the school during reception and it is seen as a year long process.
- Staff are also trying to apply the same principles to those children leaving the primary school, and are trying to forge links with other schools in the area. However, it is not currently practical to have a similar, year-long transition process.
- Work is underway to create a network of nursery and reception staff in the wedge to share good practice.

## **SWOT Summary**

### **Strengths**

The organic integration of the Children's Centre with the Primary School particularly through curriculum, teaching and staffing, etc.

### **Weaknesses**

The loose/ limited ties with other schools serving the same community - Hunslet Carr, Low Road and St Josephs.

### **Opportunities**

Work which can be done on a shared basis with the area's dysfunctional families.

### **Threats**

The Children's Centre may not yet be seen as belonging to the local community (and therefore open to users from every part of the area and available to work with each local school).

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**Visit to Kids Academy Nursery  
Friday 20th February 2009**

**Attending:**

*Scrutiny Board Members*

Cllr K Renshaw

S Hutchinson

I Falkingham

*Scrutiny Support*

Laura Nield

*Kids Academy*

Manal Baker

- The nursery has 117 places for 0-5 year olds, although at present they have a maximum of around 70 children at any one time.
- Children eligible for the 15 hours of term time only care are in a separate group from the others.
- The children all go on to a range of schools, including the following:
  - Holy Name
  - Holy Trinity
  - St Margaret's
  - Cookridge
  - Ireland Wood
  - Adel
  
- As a rule, the teachers from each primary come and visit the children in the nursery before they start school.
- The nursery also sends the school a report about every child, including their progress on each of the 6 areas of the early years curriculum.
- Parents are also provided with a more detailed profile, which is made available to the schools on request.
- The nursery staff are also often asked to go to see the Christmas play in each school
- The schools often provide feedback about how well prepared the children are for primary education
- Where schools have a staggered intake in September, the nursery work with them and with parents to look after the children until it is their turn to start school.
  
- None of the staff are qualified as teachers at present. However, two members of staff are taking the Foundation Stage degree. In addition, some of the other staff do have degrees, and a member of staff in the pre-school team is qualified to deliver the curriculum.
- In the past, Early Years Advisory teachers have come into the nursery to talk to staff about the curriculum. However, this no longer happens.
- It was felt that as a rule, private nurseries can't afford to employ teachers, while nurseries in schools and Children's Centres can do as they are subsidised.

- A new 'Early Years Professional' qualification is being introduced, but staff will need an existing degree to start this.
  - A discussion was held around whether the private sector is adequately represented within the Early Years Department, or whether the majority of staff and policymakers had a Local Authority background.
  - It was felt that a level playing field between the different sectors was essential as they are all judged on the same standards. For this to be fair, they should also all receive the same funding and support.
  - It was also pointed out that there was a common misconception that private nurseries made a huge profit, whereas this was not the case.
  - In addition, the standard of care in private nurseries is often high and the staff get to know parents very well. Due to the longer hours, the staff are effectively delivering the EYFS to children from 8am to 6pm every day, which wouldn't happen in other provision.
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- Some children at the nursery reach the end of the Foundation Stage before they start primary school, even though technically they have another year to go.
  - The one area which the nursery has found more challenging is stretching the Gifted and Talented pupils, although they are developing extended activities for the more able.
  - However, there is some concern that those pupils who are more able and have reached the end of the Foundation Stage may end up 'coasting' in reception class while the others catch up. It is difficult to make a judgement about this.
  - It was suggested that it may be helpful to have a simple document, such as a grid, on which progress in all areas can be easily recorded, and which follows the child.
  - At present, all providers have to produce reports for primary schools covering the same areas, but these are not presented in the same format.
  - Ideally, it would be helpful to have a national standard document, to cover children who cross local authority boundaries from early years to primary provision.
  - It would also be helpful to develop a means of tracking children to assess the long term impact of different types of early years provision. At present this type of tracking is only in place for SEN children.



## **Visit to Kids Unlimited Nursery Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2009**

### **Attending:**

#### *Scrutiny Board Members*

Cllr B Lancaster  
Celia Foote

#### *Scrutiny Support*

Laura Nield

#### *Kids Unlimited*

Gail Jones & colleague

- The nursery is extremely large, with capacity for 237 children. However, at present only around 160 places are filled.
- Places are only open to the children of First Direct staff.
- Some babies join the nursery as young as 3 months, but the average starting age is 6 months.
- The nursery is open from 7am to 6.15pm, to cover the range of shift patterns of First Direct staff.
- The parents pay £2.76 an hour for childcare. This is subsidised by the company.
- Both parents and staff have had a very positive response to the EYFS 'Key Person' requirement. Relationships between parents and their child's key worker are generally very close.
- Every child has two key workers, to ensure cover if one is on leave or off sick.
- Each member of staff covers a maximum of 10 children.
- This system has proved very valuable in dealing with any complaints or issues at the earliest possible stage.
- The management also meet with the room supervisors on a weekly basis to discuss priorities.
- The nursery employs a teacher who works in the pre-school section.
- There are currently two SEN children who attend the nursery, although management have found it difficult to employ staff to work with them, as many are only funded for specific times – for example, 10 hours a week, term time only.
- It was suggested that the nursery may benefit from closer links with the Council when recruiting staff.
- Currently the team do make the most of any LCC training on offer, and have found staff in early years to be flexible and supportive.
- For example, a lot of the staff have done the LCC 'portage' training for SEN children.
- In terms of the transition to primary school, there is no consistent transition, as the children go on to a range of schools across West Yorkshire.
- However, many teachers do visit the nursery to meet the child before he or she moves into their school, and when this happens the teacher will also have a discussion with the child's key worker.

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## **Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)**

### **Report of the Meadowfield Working Group**

**23 February 2009**

**Councillor R Feldman (Chair)**

**Councillor J Elliott**

**Mr T Britten**

**Mr I Falkingham**

**Mr Mike Shaw – Chair of Governors, Meadowfield Primary School**

**Jackie Green – Education Leeds**

#### Background

In January 2009 Mike Shaw, Chair of Governors at Meadowfield Primary School, presented a request for scrutiny to the full Board.

In addition to presenting his request at the Board, Mr Shaw provided extensive background information regarding the history of his concerns to the Chair of the Board.

The Scrutiny Board decided that the best way to progress the request was to appoint a working group to consider the background information provided, and then make a recommendation back to the full Scrutiny Board regarding what specific areas a scrutiny inquiry should focus on.

The working group met with Mr Shaw and a senior officer from Education Leeds to explore potential areas that the Board might usefully scrutinise.

#### Working Group Meeting

The following key information emerged from the discussion at the working group meeting:

Meadowfield Primary School and Children's Centre opened in a new building in November 2005, following the merger of two Primary Schools. The Chair of governors explained that there had been a long history of dispute with Education Leeds about certain aspects of the building project.

It was agreed by all parties that a breakdown in the relationship between the school and Education Leeds was at the heart of the concerns raised by Mr Shaw.

Without prejudging the conclusions of any inquiry, it was therefore proposed that any scrutiny work undertaken should focus on ensuring that adequate processes are in place for building projects, to manage the relationship between schools and Education Leeds. This would include looking at the application of the complaints process.

Furthermore, due to the arms-length nature of Education Leeds, it was proposed that scrutiny should also look at how the accountability arrangements between Education Leeds and Leeds City Council address a specific problem in relation to school/company relationships.

Whilst it was agreed that the focus of any scrutiny work should be on ensuring that future relationships and responsibilities are clearly defined, the working group identified two specific aspects of the Meadowfield project that members felt warranted further investigation.

The first related to the fees associated with the project, which appeared to have been left out of the original costings. As a result of this the specification for the three schools included in the project was reduced.

The second issue related to the playing field at Meadowfield primary school. Members of the working group felt that it would be useful to look in more detail at one of the key problem issues identified by the school, as an example in order to assist them to identify any lessons to be learned for the future. The working group decided that the playing field would be a useful example to use.

### Conclusion

The working group agreed that there were a number of issues that merited further investigation.

Therefore the working group recommends that the Scrutiny Board commission a further meeting of the working group to look in more detail at the following issues:

- Project management arrangements for building projects, and complaints procedures for managing the relationship between schools and Education Leeds.
- How school/company relationship issues are covered by the accountability arrangements between Education Leeds and Leeds City Council
- The costing of fees for the three schools project including Meadowfield
- The playing field

The working group would report back again to the full Scrutiny Board after this meeting.