

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.