

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Date of meeting: 24 March 2020

Item No 11

Title: Forum Correspondence

Appendix A refers

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on Forum related correspondence since the last meeting.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report;
- b) Express any views on the correspondence received.

Background

This report provides an update on Forum related correspondence received since the last meeting.

a) Correspondence from Preston City Council

On 13 February 2020, correspondence was received from the Leader and the Chief Executive of Preston City Council. The letter reported on a motion passed by the City Council at their meeting of 30 January 2020, on the subject of 'Academisation in Preston'.

A copy of the letter is provided at Appendix A and includes further information on the notice passed by the City Council, and culminates in a request for the Forum to consider a position of encouraging schools to remain within the local authority family.

The Forum is asked to consider this correspondence and express views about a response to the City Council.

Date: 12TH February, 2020
Your reference:
Our reference: MB/CE/JED

Clerk to the Lancashire Schools Forum,
Financial Management (Development and Schools),
County Hall,
Preston.
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Dear Sir/Madam,

At our recent Council meeting on 30th January, 2020, members considered the following Notice of Motion: -

“ACADEMISATION IN PRESTON

This Council notes with concern recent proposals to transform Ashton Community Science College into an academy. This Council feels that this is not the best way forward for children and communities and notes the following:

- Independent research suggests there is little evidence that academy status offers pupils a better standard of education than local authority schools. Academies haven't improved educational standards for underachievers as they set out to do. Permanent exclusion rates are nearly double the rate in academies than in local authority run schools. We fear it will be children from lower income families who will disproportionately be at greater threat from exclusion.

- Academies end local control of the school. The process takes the school out of the community of schools supported by the local authority. The school is no longer run for the benefit of the wider community and does not reflect that community. It is a direct attack on local democracy.

- The curriculum represents the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. Questions must be raised as to the extent of the National Curriculum in academies. Children are being taught potentially different areas of knowledge. The danger is that the values of business rather than society may predominate in academies. An academy may produce students tailored for the needs of the business community but we feel education has a responsibility to produce emotionally mature individuals with the capacity for creative, independent and critical thought.
- There is evidence that children who formulate independent views such as tackling climate change are often pressured to suppress such views when schools become commercially sponsored or influenced. We feel this goes against enabling children and young people to develop into rounded individuals who are encouraged to develop their own views around issues which they face growing into adulthood.
- With respect to working conditions staff might transfer on existing conditions, but this can be circumvented by skilled management. In some academies teachers are expected to work an extended day and for more hours in each academic year. Tired and over worked teachers might well affect the quality of teaching and the health of the staff.
- Academies often use admissions procedures to change their school population by selecting ten per cent of their pupils by “aptitude”. Any selection procedure can be rigged against certain groups like the 11plus historically did. You may have admissions procedures based on social class or those which unintentionally exclude other vulnerable groups, for example, children with special learning needs which could be discriminatory.
- The whole ethos of academies goes against the principles of a forward thinking education policy since education became compulsory in 1870. It undermines the aims of comprehensive education being the same for everyone, and preparing young people for all aspects of society.
- That the current Leader of Lancashire County Councillor Geoff Driver has previously expressed his support for local authority control of schools when the former Education Secretary Michael Gove criticised the low numbers of academy schools in Lancashire.”

It was subsequently resolved that the Leader and I contact the Schools Forum to express our opposition to further academisation across Preston and to request that you consider a position of encouraging schools to remain within the local authority family. I would be grateful to receive your comments and agreement to carrying out this action.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Brown', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Councillor Matthew Brown
Leader of the Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Phillips', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Adrian Phillips
Chief Executive